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THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE FATE OF KNOWLEDGE

ESSAYS ON THE TRANSVALUATION OF VALUES

Martin L. Davies



The Enlightenment and the Fate of Knowledge

The Enlightenment is generally painted as a movement of ideas and society lasting from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, but this book argues that the Enlightenment is an essential component of modernity itself. In the course of the study, Martin Davies offers an original world-view and a critique of some recent interpretations of the Enlightenment.

Martin L. Davies is Emeritus Reader at the University of Leicester, United Kingdom. He is the author of *Historics: Why History Dominates Contemporary Society*, also published by Routledge.

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of Values

Martin L. Davies

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Philosopher consiste à invertir la direction habituelle du travail de la pensée.

– Henri Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant*

Même l’histoire de la philosophie est tout à fait inintéressante si elle ne se propose pas de réveiller un concept endormi, de le rejouer sur une nouvelle scène, fût ce au prix de le tourner contre lui-même.

– Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?*

Je parle après toutes les histoires.

– Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des Loïs*



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Preface

This book arose from two interests. The first: to provide a context for the introduction to, and the concluding essay in, *Thinking about the Enlightenment. Modernity and Its Ramifications* (2016b; 2016c), a book of diverse essays by authors with diverse perspectives on the Enlightenment and Modernity. The second: to attempt to demonstrate in practice the theory of history developed in three volumes on that subject, the most recent being *How History Works: The Reconstitution of a Human Science* (2016a).

For these interests the topic of the Enlightenment was most appropriate. The theory of history, developed in *Historics* (2006), *Imprisoned by History* (2010), and *How History Works*, was meant to be enlightening. Involvement with Enlightenment ideas had already accompanied the construction of this theory. However, *The Enlightenment and the Fate of Knowledge* does not just reiterate it. (The theory argues that historical knowledge is illusory. It challenges history's claim to be a true account of what actually happened.) Rather, the question of the fate of knowledge, addressed here, offers a different form of enquiry. It is both axiological (about the fluctuating value of different forms of knowledge – specifically of the Enlightenment) and pragmatic (about commitment to cognitive positions in order to extend the scope of reality). Its intention is to formulate and practise methodical dissent. According to history's disciplinary conventions, the expert, specialist *subject* reconstitutes its own appropriate, pre-determined *object*. This cognitive conformity automatically commodifies thinking and commercializes knowledge. It is fostered now in sophisticated universities, their vice-chancellors and academic managers latter-day avatars of Plato's Protagoras. In this climate dissent is indispensable. It acknowledges the need for existential security, now that historicist liberal-humanism has failed to apply its ethical 'finish' to the world, these ethical aspirations now foiled by a fallible, planetary exo-skeleton. It contests the conceptual complacency of scholastic connoisseurship that through its expert opinion glosses over the prevailing culture of apprehension.

The Enlightenment involves all these issues. They constitute its broad conceptual field. Whether or not the Enlightenment is valued, whether or not it motivates pragmatic commitment, it is still capable of reflecting on the values of a post-ethical world. It gauges the capacity of the modern mind for

redeeming human beings from the demoralizing global circumstances they, tutored by their political guardians, have created for themselves.

For being interested in this project and for supporting it I must thank Rob Langham and his colleagues at Routledge.

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MLD

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Prolegomena

1.

The arguments presented here shun a habitual cognitive reflex. They refuse automatically to historicize what they discuss. They reject a familiar pre-emptive gambit: cognitive validity decided by academic convention. This gambit characterizes comprehension across the humanities. The Enlightenment is just a case in point. But a significant case: the scholastic consensus recognizes that it continues to motivate the desire for knowledge. That emerges clearly from the volumes upon volumes of historicized reflection on it. That is its theoretical significance. Its practical significance appears in its reflections on legal, political, and economic systems as well as in proposals for governance itself. The prevailing historicized discussion seeks to define its identity, to assess its achievements, to deplore its inconsistencies. It is a procedure of categorization, a tactic of cultural management: to put the Enlightenment in its proper place, to place it in its ‘setting’ (cf. Jacob 2019: 6ff.).

The arguments here do something different. Knowledge develops not through curiosity observing academic conventions, but through an exertion of will sustained by justifiable conviction. Whether it develops in theory or in practice, its motivation is pragmatic. It extends its cognitive situation; it enlarges reality itself. The Enlightenment is indeed a case in point. This time the pre-emptive gambit of scholastic comprehension is inverted. The Enlightenment exemplifies what happens to knowledge. Whereas academic specialists evaluate it, the Enlightenment reveals criteria for evaluating them. In itself, it illustrates the fate of knowledge in a historicized world, a world all too conscious of its historical consciousness. It suggests that these specialists, with their historical expertise, represent a social-cognitive function incompatible with the Enlightenment’s cognitive stance. The result is a paradoxical situation: interminable volumes of erudite commentary on the Enlightenment: the Enlightenment abandoned to its fate: the world itself left unenlightened.

2.

The fate of the Enlightenment: how can that be? That cannot be explained historically. History has its own dynamic. It presupposes the temporal coordination of change and continuity. It relies on categorical coordinators such as ‘forces’ or ‘processes’, or such as ‘roots’ or ‘birth’, metaphors for the development of epochs as something biological (cf. Davies 2016a: 90ff.).¹ So the Enlightenment, as a historical object, is the product of this coordinated meaning-system. Further, the concept of fate is not identical to historical ‘reception’, the Enlightenment revised by subsequent interpretations. This is just a facet of the dynamic of change and continuity. The historical object – the Enlightenment in this case – persists but only as a problematic ‘legacy’, ‘bequest’, or ‘inheritance’.

The fate of the Enlightenment indicates something else: that knowledge itself can be fatal. As the fundamental creation myth in the *Bible* illustrates, gaining knowledge has a price: the loss of Paradise, self-condemnation to existential desolation. Certainly, the fact of learning, discovering, and realizing has its own logic, momentum, and sense of achievement. But therein lies a fatal liability. This self-same fact, by its very existence, posits counter-balancing deviance into ignorance, indifference, and boredom with its confusion, dogmatism, and sense of frustration. The Enlightenment could be asked why it so amplified its moral ideals that they could not be realized; why its conception of social equality could affirm forms of totalitarianism more ruthless than those it itself opposed. And yet this fatalism enhances its significance. Its fatality is synonymous with the unforeseeable limitations of this rationally, but not reasonably administered world.

Fate is an ambiguous but fundamental psycho-sociological phenomenon. It is the product of thought and action that thought and action cannot control. Still, in the last resort it makes it make sense. To that end it suggests something both numinous and intimidating, those sinister figures in Greek mythology: Clotho spinning an individual’s thread of life, Lachesis determining its length, and Atropos terminating it with her shears. Fate signifies ambiguity and polyvalence. It always knows better than the knowledge already known. To an unforeseen crisis it supplies through narrative coherence a retrospective, causal inevitability. Should the world become inscrutable, unknowable, it defaults to resignation. Where fate is known already (as in Sophocles’s *Oedipus*) it still outwits the purely human, countervailing strategy. Thus (according to Aristotle) in tragedy the protagonist’s lack of knowledge – his or her propensity for error, for being mistaken, in the end for *not knowing* – occasions his or her downfall. But fate also signifies something conclusive, something that has exhausted itself. It exposes the fatality inherent in the very acquisition of knowledge. Its built-in obsolescence, its tendency towards redundancy, means it must always be updated to validate itself.

The Enlightenment is a specific case of these circumstances. (History offers no resolution: none exists.) Vindicating itself means it both coming to terms with its fatality and surviving whatever fatal situations confront it.

3.

Fate is a predetermined fault or retribution in the nature of things. (Antigone knows she faces death for defying Cleon's vindictive decree.) The unforeseen [*l'imprévu*] is symptomatic of cognitive limitation, of mental inadequacy. Whatever human beings might institute it compromises through unrecognized implications, through its compromising ramifications, consequences unallowed for. The unforeseen both characterizes and compromises Modernity. It constitutes a *conceptual field* within it that identifies it.

For Paul Valéry, one of its most insightful diagnosticians, Modernity is in itself a 'crisis of the unforeseen' [*crise de l'imprévu*], and no wonder: it itself presents 'a crisis of the mind' [*crise de l'esprit*]. Modernity is the world the mind creates. It is a disorientating world predicated on speed, technological enterprise, intoxication, pollution, hedonism. According to Valéry's re-interpretation, Mephistopheles, the Devil in the Faust legend with the key to comprehensive knowledge of the world, sees what modern culture is: a laboratory in which, like guinea-pigs, human beings through their daily lives are subjected to all kinds of experimentation. It, therefore, also corrupts the mind itself; it undermines its traditional cognitive behaviour. Generating unprecedented crises, this world becomes unmanageable, its destiny unforeseeable. In this cognitive situation the mind that created this world can neither predict its future nor anticipate its ramifications (cf. Valéry 1957: 988ff.; 1960: 1059ff.).

Montesquieu reveals further dimensions of this conceptual field. He also recognizes the corruption of mind in Modernity. He focusses on politics and diplomacy, human concerns orientated towards the future, pre-occupied with anticipation. In 'Analyse du Traité des Devoirs' [Analysis of the Treatise on Duties] (1725) and in 'De la politique', chapters developed from it, he differentiates between justice and politics, a 'science of cunning and artifice'. Reason, he says, exposes its uselessness: political outcomes involve such singular means and such imperceptible causes that politics itself cannot foresee them. But if it cannot work with them, Montesquieu adds, it cannot work with foreseen events either, because every foreseen revolution hardly ever happens (Montesquieu 1949: 110, 112). Montesquieu sees society as a 'union of mind' with its own common character. Its 'universal soul' adopts a way of thinking, the effect of a 'chain of infinite causes' that multiply and combine over the centuries. It produces the prevailing 'tone' of its political governance. The state at all levels relies on it until it collapses. But its self-destruction is unforeseeable because it occurs – again – through 'singular means'. These means derive from manifold causes so remote, so heterogeneous, that none appears decisive. They may be a tiny effect, hidden by an important cause, that produces important effects that could take three centuries to ferment (Montesquieu 1949: 114–15). Or again (in *Mes Pensées*), on the diplomatic level: treaties fail through including clauses that foresee what will not happen but never foresee what will (Montesquieu 1949: 1428).

Here too, the unforeseen fractures established cognitive practice, be it accepted responsive behaviour, be it historiography, that provides a consistent basis of comprehension. Montesquieu observes (in *Mes Pensées*) that ‘there are so many facts in a long history, people thought differently, its beginnings were usually obscure, so always enough can be found to validate all sorts of opinions’ (Montesquieu 1949: 1382). Valéry remarks that ‘history justifies whatever one wants. It teaches strictly nothing, because it contains everything and gives examples of everything’ (Valéry 1960: 935). Here historical ‘distance’ vanishes. Exemplified by the case of the unforeseen, the conceptual field does what it is meant to do. It maps corresponding tropisms of mind, discourse, and behaviour.

4.

Historical time passes. Its continuity produces change. Automatically events in time invalidate existing ideas, values, patterns of behaviour. Superseding each other, they remove themselves to an ever-receding past. Certainly this ‘process’ promises certainty, even historical ‘truth’. It relies on a habitual cognitive stance. The thought-conventions that academic disciplines promote reinforce it socially. It is the cornerstone of self-serving academic culture.

But the past is not really past. You could pick up now in a bookshop a current paperback edition of Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques*, insert a CD into its player to listen to Haydn’s piano sonatas as you drive down the motorway, discover in the local Age Concern Charity Shop a 1786 edition of Dominique Bouhours’s *La Manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages de l’esprit* (first published in 1687 and in various editions thereafter). The texture of the phenomenal world of daily life [*Lebenswelt*] is interwoven with such multifarious strands of asynchronicity. One of them also happens to be sitting at the computer writing books about history. Making the asynchronicity of contemporary experience intelligible requires something different from ‘continuity and change’. Hence the notion of ‘field’, – of semantic and conceptual fields of meaning and value.

‘Semantic field’ discerns cognate patterns of meaning and value in diverse discursive structures. ‘Conceptual field’ – the main issue here – produces patterns of meaning and their cognitive value through inter-relationships between diverse ideas, employing synthesis or analysis, justifiable by sufficient reason. These terms function almost synonymously, predicated as they both are on *logos*. ‘Field’ may well seem figurative or imaginary: as a logical structure it is far less fanciful than a history ‘time-line’, a chronological device for its administrative coordination.

‘Conceptual field’ has several aspects each implying an inherent logical or mental structure. *One aspect* is developed in Jacob Burckhardt’s *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* [*Observations on World History*] (1868). Burckhardt stresses from the beginning that though the mind [*Geist*] may change, it is not transitory. In whatever field [*Gebiet*] one observes, everything mental has a transient, historical appearance that will be assimilated to an immensely wider, comprehensive

structure. At the same time, everything that happens has a mental side that assimilates it to immortality, to what never changes. In whatever happens, reality implies a changing but immortal mental constitution. However, besides this, ‘conceptual field’ implies ‘space’. ‘Change’ also involves ‘plurality’ [*Vielheit*], the juxtaposition of peoples and cultures as a whole. Appreciating this would require surveying all ethnicities, peoples, manners, and religions in their contexts. This heterogeneity of values and behaviour would demand an immeasurable ethnography to embrace both its material and mental components. For their asynchronous, heterogeneous co-existence temporal succession would need converting to spatial arrangement. This spatialization would be achieved ideally by means of ‘a giant map of the mind’s territory’ [*eine riesige Geisteslandkarte*] (Burckhardt 1969: 6–8). This mental map of what ethnographically is recurrent, constant, and typical – Burckhardt’s main focus – constitutes a ‘conceptual field’.

Another aspect is developed in Ernst Cassirer’s epistemological monograph, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff. Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik* [Substance-Concept and Function-Concept. Enquiries into the Basic Questions of the Critique of Knowledge] (1910). It discusses how the mind organizes knowledge. Cassirer distinguishes between two types of concept: those that are made by abstraction of common features from disparate objects perceived, and those that see in this mental act of abstraction logical procedures for generating relationships between perceived objects (Cassirer 1994: 256). As the abstraction of common properties proceeds, they are replaced by general rules that offer a comprehensive overview of what determines the concept (Cassirer 1994: 18–20, 29). This is not a structure of identical characteristics separate from reality, rather a context for the conditions that determine the interconnection [*Bedingungs-Zusammenhang*] that makes conceptualization possible. So true knowledge of what happens in nature comes not from being an indifferent onlooker, but from surveying a purposively articulated whole. Thus conceptualization culminates in a consistent fabric [*Gewebe*] of knowledge woven by the arrangement of natural phenomena its interconnections produce (Cassirer 1994: 107, 176). This means the concept cannot be measured or justified by reference to experience. This assessment it receives from being a component of a total, theoretical complex [*Glied eines theoretischen Gesamtkomplex*]. Its truth is evinced in the conclusions it leads to: in the context and in the systematically tight structure [*in der systematischen Geschlossenheit*] of the explanations it makes possible (Cassirer 1994: 194). The expansive space within the concept for its logical functions is its conceptual field [*Gebiet*] (Cassirer 1994: 129).

A further aspect still is the re-interpretation of Cassirer’s functional ‘field’ concept in Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory. It cancels the academic stance whereby the sociologist views society as an object for comprehension. Instead, the functional concept reconceptualizes the social institution as a ‘field’. The term can be applied to any social formation. It discloses within it both the scope of behaviour it imposes and the opportunity for new interactions it allows. Bourdieu’s basic model here is the football or rugby field with rules ensuring

behavioural norms defining the game (what Bourdieu terms ‘habitus’, the way it is customarily managed), while encouraging skill and resourcefulness in the players (what Bourdieu calls ‘illusio’, or personal investment in it) (cf. Bourdieu 1994: 151ff., 154ff.). Referring directly to Cassirer, Bourdieu insists on thinking in terms of relations [*penser relationnellement*] in social formations rather than studying them in their ready-made structure and categorization (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 200). The conceptual field, in other words, defines, and is defined by, a social microcosm (cf. Bourdieu 1997: 119ff.). In this sociological context, thinking in terms of a logically defined ‘field’ conflicts with historicized succession. But this is no conflict of disciplines. Rather the conceptual field asks what arrangement of social relations, what social dynamics, permit history’s social-cognitive intentions.

Finally, *a metaphorical aspect* exposes a common, conceptual relationship transcending historical succession. It extends knowledge through this figuratively encoded logical transcendence. It resorts to spatialization where chronological succession collapses. In the introduction to *Die Typen der Weltanschauungen und ihre Ausbildung in den metaphysischen Systemen* [*Types of World-Views and Their Development in Metaphysical Systems*] (1911) Wilhelm Dilthey stresses the conflict between an increasing historical consciousness and mutually destructive philosophical systems through each claiming general validity. The past discloses nothing but the unlimited, chaotic, ever-expanding heterogeneity of philosophical systems. Consequently, ‘we look back’, he says, ‘on religious traditions, metaphysical claims, and proven systems reduced to an immense field of rubble [*ein unermessliches Trümmerfeld*]’ (Dilthey 1961: 81–2).

5.

The Enlightenment offers the present no inevitable legacy. The past cannot act upon the present, the present not upon the ever-unforeseeable future. Always the present, acting in and upon the present, is responsible for itself. It defines for itself what, how, and why it will exploit what it conceitedly calls its heritage. The present will be defined by its own circumstances suspended as it is between fatality and the unforeseen, aftermath and apprehension, this latter defining the climate of anxiety arising from the expectation of unforeseeable occurrences.

These circumstances produce a self-evaluation that offers a further disincentive to historicize. ‘Aftermath’ signifies: the collapse of history, certainly as it has been known hitherto (cf. Weber 1946: 18ff., 102ff.); the passing of the epoch wherein epochs succeed each other (cf. Anders 1986a: 20); the first generation of the last of the human species whose history will go unre-membered (cf. Anders 1986b: 174); the self-knowledge of the mind at the Hegelian end of history accomplished grotesquely by artificial intelligence beyond any human control (cf. Berardi 2009: 72–3); a sense of epilogue, the closure of the history created by the original, divine *logos* (Steiner and Adler 2017: 98, 102). In these circumstances the present, the culture of Modernity,

needs to decide whether the Enlightenment offers a legacy or a liability. It needs to evaluate it. It assumes, historiographically speaking, that what came before causes what came after, – as though history were an interminable, ineluctable chain of causes and effects; as though which effects came from which causes were self-evident.

So Marx (as in *Die Heilige Familie* [*The Holy Family*] (1844/1845)) enlists Enlightenment thinkers – amongst others: Bacon, Bayle, Hobbes, Locke, Helvétius, d'Holbach – to explain the formation of his philosophical materialism. Influence, though, operates in retrospect, not as immediate, uncritical deference to cultural authorities in the past. Rather it works critically, selecting the past cultural authority most suitable for a present purpose. So too (as in the case of Isaiah Berlin) it is perverse to transmute their conception of anthropological 'sameness' into totalitarian uniformity. In neither example is there any way of knowing if these *philosophes* would have approved of being thus ideologically co-opted. That they could be is more an effect of sophistical historicism than a propensity of their thought. However, that they have been may be due to a very modern resentment. It arises from a deep-seated discontent with life in this technocratically ordered world assembled by instrumentalized reason extracted from Enlightenment rationality.

The Enlightenment does not have to be a legacy. Ideas and projects do not proceed or recede according to the machinery of causation. Rather they expand or contract according to their value at any time within the overall conceptual field of inter-active, heterogeneous cultural values. Further – and this is historicization at its most deceitful – there is no need to presume that an idea is finished, a project exhausted, just because its historical 'moment' is over. They seek refuge in old, worn books hardly ever borrowed from the university library, or re-assert themselves on rare occasions in brand-new, digitized, on-demand reprints. In other words, they hibernate. This happens to the Enlightenment within (e.g.) the conceptual field of philosophical vitalism [*Lebensphilosophie*] and its subsequent critique. Its value is dropping already in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* [*The Birth of Tragedy*] (1872). Socrates, for the Enlightenment tantamount to a secular Christ, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, devoted to the unending quest for knowledge, are both held responsible for the emergence of an Alexandrine culture both inquisitive and technocratic. This meant the demise of the cult of Dionysus and with it the Classical tragic world-view, long-lost values Nietzsche himself was intending to revive. Half a century later, its value drops further – is even more out of fashion – in the critique of vitalism in Heinrich Rickert's *Die Philosophie des Lebens. Darstellung und Kritik der Philosophischen Modeströmungen Unserer Zeit* [*The Philosophy of Life. The Representation and Criticism of the Fashionable Philosophical Currents of Our Time*] (1920). Despite the efforts of Nietzsche and Bergson (Rickert says), with its rationalism and principle of stability 'the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century is in our time indubitably still not "dead" [*auch darf nicht bezweifelt werden, daß in unserer Zeit die Aufklärung des 18. Jahrhunderts noch immer nicht "tot" ist*]' (Rickert 1920: 176, 178).

This hibernation, then, can be liberating. Forget the ‘legacies’ and ‘bequests’ of cultural tradition: a receptive mind is an intellectual restorative. Hibernation offers an opportunity for both the re-evaluation of the Enlightenment and the renovated commitment to supporting it. Its refurbished value neutralizes others. It takes a moment of reflection. For all the lessons history allegedly supplies, the world is fatally compromised by the human species’ tendency towards not just genocide but also its own ‘geno-suicide’ (e.g. through war and terrorism; planned socio-economic poverty; totalitarian global capitalism; environmental destruction; global warming), but also by the ultimate *trahison des clercs*, with Heidegger having revealed all thought since the Pre-Socratics as self-deception, with Derrida thereafter pretending no writing – inevitably deferred, inevitably differing – can describe it anyway. The observer is left helpless: transfixed with shock and bereft of words, the redundancy of historical achievement.

So the table has turned. ‘The Enlightenment’ has shifted its meaning. It includes a collective noun for its characteristic spectators, for them being ‘impartial observers’ of the fate of its values (cf. Smith 1982: 137). Their eighteenth-century status affords them a superior perspective on its subsequent prevailing failures as well as a structure organizing its broader conceptual field. Think of them as the onlookers of an exiled, modern-day Ovid trying to rescue himself from his capsized cosmic vessel ‘gazing from a safe height upon [his] shipwreck’ (Ovid 1975: 243–5; V.xi.17). Think of the spectacle of the present acceding to its Enlightenment ‘legacy’ ‘beaming with disaster triumphant’ (cf. Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 7).

6.

The question of the adequacy of human knowledge informs both the fate of knowledge and knowledge as a form of fatality (as in Classical tragedy), the unintended political production of the unforeseen and the unforeseeable, and its management of what its historicized consciousness receives as a cultural ‘legacy’ or ‘inheritance’. It thereby also implies that, as the foundation of knowledge, reason itself is deficient. This question targets the viability of the Enlightenment. More importantly, it defines a mind attuned neither to its natural environment nor to the world it has constructed for itself.

This question might not have arisen if, in Classical and Mediaeval philosophy mental adequacy had not been a pre-condition of reliable knowledge, – as with Aquinas citing Isaac Israeli that “‘Truth is the adequation of thing and intellect’” (Aquinas 1998: 167). From the Latin verb *adaequare*, adequacy implies equivalence, hence ‘equal value’. It requires the means to be sufficient for achieving the projected ends and the ends themselves worth the means to achieve them. Inadequacy, therefore, implies an imbalance between mental effort and cognitive value. It suggests too that, essentially theoretical, adequacy is unattainable practically. Consequently, it manifests itself in constant realignments of mind and world, in incessant transvaluations of values (e.g. Marxist

materialism's transvaluation of Hegelian idealism). Its performance can, therefore, be defined further.

Adequacy implies tautology, i.e. $A=A$: Parmenides's principle 'that the same thing exists for thinking and for being' and (as mentioned above) reiterated in scholastic thought (Kirk and Raven 1969: 269). Aquinas also cites Aristotle asserting in thought itself a capacity to define reality, 'to say what is is, and what is not is not' (Aquinas 1998: 167; Aristotle 1996b: 200–1 (1011b25)). As 'primary to tautology', 'the act of exact and immediate repetition or reiteration' may well affirm an adequate relationship between mind and world (Steiner 1997: 353). So for Bergson this tautological adequacy is the 'absolute law of consciousness'; for Heidegger 'the supreme law of thought'; for Leibniz indispensably demonstrating certainty, the basis of 'originary truths' that 'affirm the same about the same' [*idem de se ipso affirmantes*] (Bergson 1982: 156; Heidegger 2002: 9; Leibniz 1999: 1655). Hence for 'informing western criteria of intelligibility', particularly the Enlightenment and the fate of knowledge, tautology as absolute adequacy is significant for being 'generative of reason and of systematic constructs of thought' (cf. Steiner 1997: 353, 356).²

Adequacy – as equivalence – also signifies exchange: exchanging commodities for money in the market-places of Classical Greece. The commercial transaction relies on adequate value-equivalents. As Alfred Sohn-Rethel argues in *Warenform und Denkform* [*Commodity Form and Thought Form*] (1971), this is the basis of abstract thought, both as evinced in Kant's epistemology and dominating bourgeois thinking in general (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 35–7; Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 11). Otherwise in a figurative form it estimates ratios of adequacy, – as when Voltaire in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764/1769) equates religious intolerance with psychopathic behaviour (Voltaire 1967: 196; cf. Davies 2016b: 238).

Further, *adequacy* re-evaluates the concept of inadequacy itself. The Enlightenment could not equate the beauty and order of the natural world with the ugliness and disorder of the human world integral to it.³ The anatomy of the least insect would reveal evidence of intelligent design; the anatomy of society only labyrinthine confusion. This ontological dilemma was resolved by re-functioning its inadequacy as *a priori* adequate for its anthropological resolution. It is not just tautology affirming 'Man' as mankind's 'proper study', as Pope asserted. Rather cognitive inadequacy – here indicated in italics – is re-evaluated as the criterion of truth: 'All Nature is but Art, *unknown* to thee:/ All Chance, Direction, which thou canst *not see*;/ All Discord, Harmony, *not understood*'. In any case, 'Whatever is, is right' (Pope 1983: 249; I, ll.289–91, 294). Whatever is – even inadequacy – is adequate.

But where this 'inadequate adequacy' is thought insufficient it turns to a risky solipsism. As Giambattista Vico argues, why should philosophers 'have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows', thereby 'neglecting the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could come to know'. A purely human construction, the historical world ensures *a priori* its

own cognitive adequacy, – as when in *The New Science* (1744) he asserts, that ‘the world of civil society has certainly been *made by men*, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of *our own* [i.e. the same] *human mind*’ [*dentro le modificazioni della nostra medesima mente umana*] (Vico 1984: 96; §331; 1959: 382; I, iii (my italics)). Immanuel Kant too, in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [*Critique of Judgement*] (1790), offers a not dissimilar form of adequacy. It underpins the historicist character of nineteenth-century historiography (as, e.g. with J.G. Droysen). It re-aligns mind and world to assert the creation of a human world of culture as fulfilling Nature’s ultimate purpose. Civil society thus bestows on Nature an otherwise unachievable order and coherence (Kant 1968: 300–2; §83).

Cognitive adequacy therefore requires the transvaluation of values for its rectitude. Whenever adequacy fails, it alone remains to redress it with new certainties, new values. A culture of incessant transvaluation (such as Modernity or particularly the Enlightenment) is symptomatic of inadequacy, of a chronic dislocation of mind and world, and of desperate attempts to re-align them. Transvaluation is, therefore, marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, any particular transvaluation can be re-evaluated for its approximation to adequacy; on the other, precisely because it lacks stability, it can neither match mind and world adequately nor, therefore, replicate the cognitive equilibrium that supports comprehension. At the same time, adequacy is itself no guarantee of cognitive rectitude. It fails not because the mental effort to achieve it might be inadequate so that both effort and aim need re-assessing, but because the cognitive stability it demands is itself flawed: ongoing transvaluations of values have to be the sole basis of knowledge. Because it connotes by definition nothing exceptional, because it cannot exceed the world it inhabits, adequacy persists on the brink of inadequacy.

7.

The fate of knowledge depends on its value; so too does the Enlightenment. But how this value is assessed depends on the motivation for assessing it. A sociological or culturalist perspective will show it fluctuating as it attempts to redress cognitive inadequacy. It may also signify popular, highly prized opinions, if not ideas, spreading epidemiologically through society. But, as in the political culture of absolutism, values vindicating state and church power can be directly imposed, – as (e.g.) suggested by the sentiment that Kant, in appreciating the Enlightenment, attributed to Friedrich II: ‘reason as much as you wish about whatever you wish, just see you obey’ (cf. Kant 1982b: 61). Further, the concept of value – cognitive value – suggests something economic, such as the rise or fall of share-values reacting to events in the wider world. This economic equivalence of cultural values is unsurprising under capitalism. In an essay on the ‘Liberté de l’esprit’ [‘The Freedom of the Mind’] (1939) Valéry defends using the idiom of the stock-exchange to discuss ‘intellectual issues’ [*choses spirituelles*]. He asserts he finds nothing better for describing them. Both the

intellectual and the material economy, on reflection, can be well-summarized in terms of a simple conflict of evaluations [*se résumant [...] fort bien dans un simple conflit d'évaluations*] (Valéry 1960: 1081). 'Value' would thus function as a barometer of the social and cultural atmosphere. The heterogeneous and asynchronous components of a given conceptual field advance or retreat, combine or disintegrate according to cognitive adequacy. This ongoing transvaluation of values explains historical change far more effectively than the machinery of causation, the historiographical convention.

With the fate of knowledge depending on its value, cognitive value itself arises within the cognitive situation. 'Cognitive situation' identifies the relationship between the self (ego) and its world: a fundamental experience. In phenomenological terms, it defines a relationship based on knowing about this world and operating in the light of that knowledge [*savoir (que)*]; on instrumentalized knowledge, knowledge as knowing about how things work [*savoir-faire*]; and on existential self-knowledge involving the inter-relation of what the self is, what it knows itself to be, what it would like to become [*savoir-être*] (cf. Schlanger 1990: 89–91). Accordingly, all knowledge is subjective, as much for a research team (as a team) as for an individual cognitive purpose. This goes for any group of academic experts in the humanities with its consensus on the permissible disciplinary scope of comprehension for its particular interest. It goes too for the philosopher's reconception of the world. The Enlightenment itself arose from rectifying inadequacies in the prevailing cognitive situation. Galileo – exemplifying *savoir (que)* – relocates the Earth away from the centre of the universe to an orbit around the Sun, exposing and so remedying the inadequacy of hitherto conventionally received astronomy. His reconception of nature as a self-contained mechanism operating with its own mathematical forms still – for Edmund Husserl fatefully – underpins a prevailing conception of natural science detached from the everyday world people actually inhabit (cf. Husserl 2012a: 5ff., 23ff.). Bacon (as evaluated by Macauley in his 1837 essay) represents a momentous transvaluation of values. Targeting (e.g.) Plato, Seneca, and Cicero, let alone scholastic theology, he opposes the 'progressive degeneracy' of philosophy with common-sense. He thereby promotes the cognitive superiority and social value of the 'mechanic', – thereby exemplifying *savoir-faire* (cf. Macaulay 1883: 399–400, 407–8). He thus developed a form of knowledge adequate for the basic practical demands of human existence. But 'what we most admire' – that is: most value – 'is the vast capacity of that intellect which [...] takes in at once all the domains of science, all the past, the present, and the future, all the errors of two thousand years, all the encouraging signs of the passing times, all the bright hopes of the coming age' (Macaulay 1883: 413). Descartes, too, finds the prevailing institutionalized knowledge erroneous for being inadequate. He, therefore, has to search for a new method of his own to satisfy his 'extreme desire' to distinguish between truth and falsehood. This enables him to see what motivates his actions and so to proceed with confidence. In thus wishing to spend his life cultivating his reason according to his own method, he adopts an existential position, *savoir-être*, in that his whole

essence and nature is to think, in that ‘thought is existence’ (Descartes 1966: 39, 54, 60; Huxley 1893: 172). What defines the value of Descartes’s thinking defines his existential ‘greatness’. He (says Huxley) belongs to those who ‘embody the potentiality of their own day and magically reflect the future’, who ‘express the thoughts which will be everybody’s two or three centuries after them’ (Huxley 1893: 167).

The cognitive situation does not require its component types of knowledge (*savoir (que)*; *savoir-faire*; *savoir-être*) to be in equilibrium. Rather it reveals different broad types of knowledge and accordingly different sets of knowledge-values. On the one hand, it involves knowledge as comprehension (that is: *savoir (que)*; *savoir-faire*). ‘Knowing that...’ signifies one form of comprehension: the encyclopaedic memory of the scholastic connoisseur. It values detailed factual knowledge of its topic for the resourceful interpretations it supports. ‘Knowing how...’ offers other forms of comprehension. It facilitates what Spengler calls the Faustian drive for knowledge, since Faust – for all his academic credentials – in his frustration admits that he has yet to discover ‘what in its innermost holds the world together’ [*was die Welt/im Innersten zusammenhält*] (cf. Goethe 1963: 20; ll.382). The infinities of space, time, and matter itself confront the Faustian individual who seeks to overcome and explore them by technological means (cf. Spengler 1977: 494; 1976: 917, 940). This drive for knowledge is powered by a curiosity so insatiable that nothing restrains it, certainly not ethical scruples, as the contract with Mephistopheles confirms. In this respect, the drama *Faust*, on which Goethe worked periodically for most of his life (1749–1832), offers a counter-weight to the intellectual ambitions and achievements of the Enlightenment. Yet the comprehension cognitive insatiability offers goes unfulfilled. Inherent in it is what makes curiosity insatiable: a permanent sense of inadequacy. Comprehension can always be ‘better’ or ‘fuller’. Consequently it turns from the macrocosm to the microcosm, from knowing comparatively little about everything, to knowing nearly everything about comparatively little: the demonic Faustian drive still propels technically specialized expertise, still expands the human species’ mental scope. Finally, given the technocratic ethos of the modern cognitive situation, existential self-knowledge is inevitably marginalized unless already assimilated to the technosphere. Historicization, placing everyone in the context of their times, is the form this assimilation takes. But it also produces resistance: the desire to live against the prevailing values; the aim to provoke a transvaluation of values: the cognitive stance of intellectual dissidence.

To sum up: the Enlightenment does not have to be an object of contemplation [*theoria*], the basis of a historicized analysis. If, as *savoir-être*, it is of existential value, recognizes what the human species knows itself to be, projects what it would like to become, knowledge needs to be desired, defined, and enacted. But the question of value is itself problematic. Its conceptual field displays – through axiology, the science of ‘weighing up’ values [*axia*] – a wide range of functional relationships that contribute to the fate of knowledge (cf. Hartmann 2017: 31). Some crucial orientations can be discerned:

Value can be ideological, – as when economic and political purposes impose instrumental, affirmative knowledge (cf. Horkheimer 1974: 21, 94ff.). It can be vitalistic, – since human life produces itself through what it values, through what the social individual understands and appreciates. In this case, values themselves may not change, but only the prevailing social attitudes towards them (cf. Rickert 1920: 185, 187).

But, as functional concepts, values can be created. At their best, they enhance the reality of lived experience and extend the sense of the world. They depend on a pragmatic attitude. They arise from actions that exceed what is already known and understood, – in other words, from actions neither determined by historical precedent nor restrained by its pre-emptive occlusion of the future (history being the knowledge of knowledge already known) (cf. Lapie 1902: 258). Further, value is constituted by various factors it relates to each other, such as situation, whether cognitive or social; interest, whether vital, existential, or intellectual; desire, whether a physical need or an aspiration; and effort, which implies an assessment of whether the means, energy, or the commitment it requires are adequate for realizing it (cf. Dewey 2008: 203ff., 211ff.). The constant fluctuation in values confirms that the world is not fixed, that knowledge can never guarantee being adequate for its comprehensive purpose. Rather in pragmatic and phenomenological terms (as James argues) ‘truth is a relation, not of our ideas to non-human realities, but of conceptual parts of our experience to sensational parts’ and (he continues) ‘those thoughts are true that guide us to *beneficial interaction* with sensible particulars as they occur, whether they copy these in advance or not’. Thought is not a ‘passive mirror’ reflecting ‘a world complete in itself’. Rather it is ‘a most momentous part of fact, and the whole mission of the pre-existing and insufficient world of matter may simply be to provoke thought to produce its far more precious supplement’. The world, therefore, may seem to be ‘absolutely fixed and finished’ (and – one might say – already conventionally historicized); whereas, arising from the inherent impetus of experience, the determinations of thought (its self-evaluations) ensure that ‘reality genuinely grows’ (James 1978: 216–17; 222).

Thus, from an axiological standpoint, only a historicized world could dismiss the Enlightenment as a ‘false friend’. But it cannot be blamed for what came after. This accusation expresses the resentment of those who came after realizing belatedly they should have valued it. But they wanted different values: ostensibly the practical benefits of the Enlightenment were not equal to the costs of maintaining its moral value. Mark Pattison in his essay ‘The Age of Reason’ (1877), an incisive indictment of ‘progressive’ European culture, suggests as much. Like Valéry, he too resorts figuratively to the capitalist idiom to formulate his critique. ‘The nineteenth century has made enormous progress’, he concedes. ‘But’, he adds, ‘the progress has been attended with a diminution of the dividend of social happiness receivable by each shareholder, although the gross amount available for distribution has been larger’. He concludes by saying that ‘this has been the fact; and theory shows the fact was to have been

anticipated as the natural consequence of progress' (Pattison 1877: 357). The Enlightenment concept of progress might have foreseen this eventuality.

Taking a historicist view, Pattison sees two conflicting sets of value. He acknowledges the moral principles of the Enlightenment promising human progress. With this he contrasts the changed conditions of life in the nineteenth century: their technological enhancement but also, compared with the eighteenth century, an increase in human self-destruction that sabotages them. So historians now blaming contemporary history on the 'distant' Enlightenment, on its ideals and ideas, is pointless. Rather, in case they are worth anything, their value has to be affirmed. They need a pragmatist commitment: not just the ethical idea [*Vorstellung*], but also the will [*Wille*] to realize it.

8.

Take Isaiah Berlin as an example. His conception of the *philosophe* illustrates the cognitive redundancy inherent in the habit of historicization. His attitude to the Enlightenment is ambivalent. He recognizes that 'the intellectual power [...] of the most gifted thinkers of the eighteenth century remain to this day without parallel', that 'their age is one of the best and most hopeful episodes in the life of mankind' (Berlin 2001b: 52). He says he 'never lost [his] admiration for and sense of solidarity with the Enlightenment', yet became 'critical of [...] some of its consequences, both logical and social'. These are the spectres of totalitarianism, derived from Marxism, and fascism, derived from the Counter-Enlightenment and Romanticism. They haunt his liberal, pluralistic *Weltanschauung* (Berlin 2001a: 4; 1979a: 24).

The implication is that Enlightenment values would not resist totalitarianism or fascism. This ambivalence towards it is accentuated in two different ways. *First*, it describes the Enlightenment as a form of monism by definition 'at the root of every extremism' because 'the central doctrine of the progressive French thinkers [...] rested on the belief [...] that human nature was fundamentally the same in all times and places (Berlin 2001a: 14; 1979a: 1). *Second*, it describes the Counter-Enlightenment not just as a 'defiant rejection of the central theses of the Enlightenment' but as the recognition that 'the forces that shape men are [...] more complex, and differ from age to age and culture to culture and cannot be contained in [...] simple cut and dried formulas' (Berlin 1979a: 12, 19).

The *first* form of ambivalence is a *non sequitur*. There are the lines spoken by Chremes in Terence's comedy *Heauton Timourumenos* [*The Self-Tormenter*]: *homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto* ['I'm human, so any human interest is my concern'] (Terence 1976: 104). Often quoted by the advocates of Enlightenment, they define 'human' as a universal value that encompasses diverse beliefs and behaviour. The 'sameness' Berlin rejects produces not cognitive uniformity, even less social conformity, let alone extremism. It derives from tautology as the fundament of Western thought. It affirms (with Alexander Pope in his *Essay on Man* (1773–1774)) that Man is mankind's 'proper study'

(cf. Davies 2016c: 229ff.). Along with the divine providence from which it is derived, this proposition is meant to form the basis of knowledge. Thus, far from endorsing extremism, a monistic transcendental order encapsulates, even supports, or is at least tolerant of, behavioural heterogeneity. And this argument can be pressed further. The sense of a natural human equality (or ‘sameness’) actually forms the basis of democracy. This does have its disadvantages: amongst others, truth and objectivity are superseded by personal and mass opinion; the individual senses his or her inadequacy by contrast with the prevailing majority; the general method of thinking could well inhibit personal thought. Nevertheless, it identifies a fundamental premise, ‘a basic human dignity independent of that person’s competences and accomplishments’ (Bourdon 2007: 301–3; cf. Tocqueville 1992: 518–23).

The *second* form of ambivalence is Berlin’s own invention. It is based on categorical coordinators: ‘*forces* that *shape* men’; ‘differ from *age* to *age*’. And these occur in a statement that contrasts ‘central theses’ (of the Enlightenment) with (forces) ‘more complex’. The historian applies these coordinators to make history make sense. In the first case, their positive meaning is vacuous because their negative is nonsense: whenever did ‘historical’ *forces* **not** *shape* men? Only the tautological formulation lends it credibility. In the second case ‘age’ is an artifice of historicizing discourse. The Counter-Enlightenment, along with Romanticism, marks difference as defined by their ‘age’. But these different tendencies have their own constitutive similarities: how else to recognize them? As Mannheim points out, in constructing historical periods and cultural movements: ‘We derive the “spirit of the epoch” from its individual documentary manifestations – and we interpret the individual documentary manifestations on the basis of what we know about the spirit of the epoch’ (cf. Mannheim 2000; 74; cf. Davies 2016a: 97–8; 2016b: 4–7). In the third case, Berlin implies that ‘central theses’ and ‘simple formulas’ must succumb to ‘complex forces’, – as though the Enlightenment which could comprise, e.g. both Leibniz and La Mettrie could itself not be ‘complex’; – as though the Counter-Enlightenment could not have ‘central theses’ and all too simplistic ‘simple formulas’, those asserted, e.g. by Joseph de Maistre in *Les Soirées de Saint Petersburg* (1821): the altar as the basis of civilization, the executioner as the cornerstone of society, the degenerate state of mankind, the advocacy of war and violence, condemnation of the *philosophes* (e.g. *inter alia* Voltaire, Locke, Rousseau).

Berlin’s ambivalence towards the Enlightenment is facilitated by strategic habits in his practice of historicization. These organize historical comprehension into categories of ‘precursors’ and ‘successors’, of (preceding) cause and (after-) effect. But they do not actually explain change, the Enlightenment’s historically alleged demise. That is because Berlin has no sense of its fate. He fails to see it as a clash of values. Historically speaking, one such system might predominate, e.g. as Romanticism. In axiological terms, however, other value-systems remain latent, hibernating. Their historical marginalization does not cancel their axiological significance.

Conversely, Berlin's stance on the Enlightenment implies that the past is complicit in a present (in this case menaced by totalitarianism) it could not have foreseen. His historicizing habits effect for the present a self-exculpating retrospective incrimination of the past (in this case: the Enlightenment). This leaves the past to blame for the political mismanagement of the present. Not to recognize that the past thus historicized ensures the *pre-emptive self-occlusion* of the present blocks its self-enlightenment.

Berlin's liberal stance cannot but censure totalitarian societies. But he failed to recognize that societies projecting the spectacle of personal freedom and liberal thought rely on 'totalitarian capitalism', a global socio-economic system that also depends on scientific organization 'harmonizing pluralism' (cf. Marcuse 1986: 61).

9.

Historicized thinking construes the seventeenth century as an 'age of genius', the occasion of the 'birth of the modern mind', while the Enlightenment itself forms the 'threshold of modernity' (cf. Grayling 2016; cf. Gay 1995: 419). That in these statements Modernity is not synchronized with itself (if they do not contradict themselves) says more about its conceptual field than when, in what 'period' of Modernity, the Enlightenment began. Statements such as these see it as an infant that grows and develops or as a facility for transition. These biological and architectural metaphors act as categorical coordinators. They assert that ideas and values of the Enlightenment within the conceptual field of Modernity must be arranged temporally. They imply that their potential takes time to emerge. However, the presupposition of movement and progress is surely intellectually fraudulent. This is why:

In nature, everything takes time; temporality is both a property of everything and indifferent to anything, – as Shakespeare observes in *The Winter's Tale*, time passes 'the same [...] ere ancient'st order was/or what is now received'. These categorical coordinators confuse 'natural time', what Bergson calls *durée*, with the chronological arrangement of human affairs. Further, through his or her genetic character, the mature human being is already in the new-born infant. Certainly, he or she will know neither what fate has already waiting nor what unforeseeable crises are imminent. But the resolve to confront them would already be latent. Then, the 'threshold' metaphor – specifically: the trope of synecdoche – implies the building's total construction (even if not yet decorated or furnished). Without the pre-existence of the whole building in which the threshold-part is located the metaphor is redundant.

It makes sense, therefore, to dispense with this automatic historicization: to see the Enlightenment assimilated to the conceptual field of Modernity, to inform the discussion re-evaluating it with reference to Modernity in general. The Enlightenment thus becomes a test-case of the fate of knowledge. The argument would show the extent of its imbrication in modern culture. Why, therefore, incriminate it as a historicized object in the eighteenth century

when it suffuses the contemporary cultural environment responsible for managing it? Here the dogma of a historical (i.e. chronological) continuum would exculpate the cognitive practice and cultural values of contemporary life now. Can it really be maintained that the return of fascism in contemporary Europe arises from the ‘tradition of the Enlightenment’? Can it really be argued that its ‘mindset around its “articles of faith”’ such as ‘human progress, the natural goodness of man, rationality, institutions, and political and social values as the main pillars of a just society’ actually conceal both ‘the impact of the will to power, lust, desire, and self-interest have on the human condition’ and ‘the political cultivation of our worst irrational sentiments: resentment, hatred, xenophobia, lust for power, and fear’ that produces fascism (Riemen 2018: 20–1)? Surely it was the exact converse? Surely the tyranny of absolutism in the eighteenth century offered an abundance of expressions of humanity’s ‘worst irrational sentiments’? Surely this was what made its advocates assert a set of countervailing values, values based on humanism?

10.

One has only the knowledge one has. One assumes it adequate for one’s intentions, for motivating the actions that will realize them, for it being conducive to what one would wish to be. And yet, as demonstrated by tragic fatality, this assumption is unfounded. That ‘valuations are constant phenomena of human behavior’ suggests dislocation between mind and world, knowledge and existence (and even though – or perhaps because – mind is inherent in the world and knowledge inherent in existence) (Dewey 2008: 241). Underlying this assumption is the question of what incontrovertibly is the basis of human knowledge, the capacity for anyone to say or do anything.

In the Enlightenment’s conceptual field reason has a crucial cognitive and ethical function. It meets the need for an epistemological basis. As *logos* it combines language, thought, logic, and – by extension – mathematically based science, this latter after Newton, evidence that ‘a mortal Man’ could ‘unfold all Nature’s law’ (cf. Pope 1983: 251). Yet the basic problem persists. Newton’s universe has long since been superseded. Neither the natural nor the human sciences can know how comprehensive their comprehension can actually be, how cognitively adequate they are for the purposes they serve. So this problem is itself transvalued. Instead of being based on ever more reason, knowledge is defined by reason sufficient to guarantee its temporary certainty.

The principle of sufficient reason, therefore, offers a further logical premise for adequately connecting the mind with the world and knowledge with existence. Enunciated in Classical philosophy, endorsed by the Enlightenment, and refunctioned subsequently by idealism it still informs the human sciences. According to Leibniz in his *Monadologie* (1714), it states that ‘no fact would be found true or existing, no proposition truthful, without there being a sufficient reason for it being thus and not otherwise, even though most frequently these reasons may not be known to us’ (Leibniz 1962: 496; §32). Its proximity to

the principle of identity (adequacy, mental equivalence) is demonstrated by Schopenhauer's observation that 'the principle of sufficient reason in general is the expression of the basic form of the necessary connection of all our objects, i.e. mental images, that lies in the very centre of our capacity for knowledge' (Schopenhauer 1980: 113). It is the foundation of the human mind. It explains what must occur in the understanding to reassure the mind that it has adequate knowledge for making sense of the world it perceives, that mind and world are properly aligned. Its proximity to the principle of identity is also confirmed by Heidegger when he observes: '[T]he principle of sufficient reason is *the* basic principle of all basic principles' [*Der Satz vom Grund ist d e r Grundsatz aller Grundsätze*].⁴ Only the principle of identity, the adequate connection between mind and world ($A=A$), takes precedence (cf. Heidegger 1997: 21).

It is also in proximity to it in a now familiar way. Assessing if at any moment reason is sufficient to grasp reality involves calculation, – a facet of assessment, a procedure of evaluation. For it to work humans have to be 'calculating creatures'; reason as basis [*Grund*] is interpreted as *ratio*, as reckoning (Heidegger 1997: 210). Hence, this principle becomes the basis of Modernity with its increasingly sophisticated technical expertise and its thoroughgoing calculable coordination of its constituent elements. Instead of turning to what gives life meaning [*Besinnung*], even reconceiving '*Grund*' as Being [*Sein*] otherwise disregarded in this technocratic culture, Modernity is taken hostage by 'thinking that merely calculates' (Heidegger 1997: 198, 199).

But the principle of sufficient reason has a further function. It cancels the distinction between monistic reason, the basis of a repressive human uniformity (allegedly driven by the Enlightenment) and emotive individualism (allegedly inspired by Romantic idealism seen historically, conventionally, as the Enlightenment's corrective successor). This function is evident from a sociological perspective. For Bourdieu the principle of sufficient reason lends human social behaviour coherence. Sociology needs to suppose that social agents do not act arbitrarily, that they do not act without reason. This (he continues) does not mean that they are rational, that they have reasons for the way in which they act, or that reasons orientate their actions. They can act reasonably without themselves being rational: their action can be explained hypothetically by reason without having rationality as its principle. They can rationally evaluate their chances of success, which justifies their behaviour, without having as its principle a rational calculation of their chances. The principle of sufficient reason thus 'transforms an apparently incoherent, arbitrary series of conducts into a coherent series that can be comprehended by a unique principle or a coherent group of principles' (Bourdieu 1994: 150). To contend that anti-Enlightenment, Romantic thinking was more attentive to individuality than Enlightenment thinking misses the point. A certain sufficiency of reason underpins both cultural attitudes. They are two different facets – not mutually exclusive – of the same sufficiently rational conduct.

However, both principles, adequacy and sufficiency, imply their negation: inadequacy and insufficiency, characteristic of the conceptual field of Modernity

and its incessant cognitive transvaluations. Striving to be ever more comprehensive, and thereby meaning to enlighten, knowledge is exposed to its fateful inadequacy or insufficiency. So, as something fateful aiming for comprehensive knowledge but aware of its endemic insufficiency, the Enlightenment offers an ‘adequate’ explanation of, and ‘sufficient reason’ for, Modernity. Conversely, Modernity would signify the failure of the basic principle [*Grund*] of intelligibility (as in the cognitive frustration experienced by Spengler’s Faustian individual). Already predicated on redundancy, the principles of identity (i.e. adequacy) and of sufficient reason inevitably collapse, – collateral damage that proves fatal to the Enlightenment, a component of Modernity’s conceptual field, and to opportunities for its self-transvaluation. It cannot help being compromised when the basis [*Grund*] of intelligibility fragments.

So here too a transvaluation occurs: the principle of sufficient reason mutates into its inadequate negation, ‘the principle of *insufficient* reason’ [*das Prinzip des unzureichenden Grundes*]. This version from Robert Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* [*The Man Without Qualities*] (1930ff.) vindicates human beings excepting themselves from the principle of sufficient reason, since ‘both in personal and in public-historical life what always happens actually has no proper basis in reason’ [*was eigentlich keinen rechten Grund hat*] (Musil 1978: 134–5).

So in the end the ultimate achievement of the Enlightenment in its own fatality, in its persistent self-transvaluation, may be to recognize that any proposed basis for knowledge – including ‘Man’ – is illusory. Knowledge would be based, therefore, on what seems reasonable: on what is broadly accepted as working while expecting something more; on ongoing ‘debates’ governing disciplinary self-orientation; and on the ‘simple intellectual honesty’, that should inform value-free, disciplinary practice (cf. Weber 1988: 613). In any case, the capacity to reason may just be a ‘facility in taking mental habits’, convincing by its familiarity arising analogically from ‘the feelings under which the habit was first formed’, – a familiarity intellectuals target for disruption (cf. Peirce 1992: 291). But it may be best to recognize that not everything can be proved: that ‘there can be no scientific knowledge of the first principles; and since nothing can be more infallible than scientific knowledge except intuition [*nous*], it must be intuition that apprehends the first principles’. In other words, ‘the starting point for scientific knowledge is not itself scientific knowledge’ (Aristotle 1997: 260–1; 100 b.5ff.; cf. Bourdon 2007: 22ff.). So that, what else remains but to see the logical principles aligning mind with the world and knowledge with existence as ‘logical fictions’? With them at least thought and action would appear ‘as if’ [*als ob*] their basis were secure (cf. Vaihinger 1918: 18ff., 21ff.).

11.

For Pierre Bourdieu ‘the scholastic condition is a systematic principle of error’ (Bourdieu 1997: 63). This judgement arises from *Méditations pascaliennes*, a book that – *inter alia* – aims with its allusions to Pascal to enlighten the Enlightenment

(Bourdieu 1997: 86). It rejects the imperial universal perspective available to the scholastic connoisseur for categorically coordinating cultural values, for affirming the already prevailing values. Instead it advocates open access to the universal as a means of challenging scholastic authority (Bourdieu 1997: 86–7). It, therefore, offers a re-evaluation of values. In particular, it exposes the endemic misalignment between technical and existential interests, between explanation (passively received) and understanding (actively pursued).

Typically scholastic connoisseurs dispense with methodical self-reflection, e.g. their assumption that all social action is based on a clear, pre-meditated strategy, which is ‘unreal’ and ‘particularly typical of the scholastic vision, this knowledge that does not know itself’ [*particulièrement typique de la vision scholastique, cette connaissance qui ne se connaît pas*] (Bourdieu 1997: 165). They think they have no need for methodical self-reflection. Instead (as Bourdieu implies), historicization provides the conceptualization of their topic; historical discourse generates its requisite analytical account. Both sustain the amplifications of technical specialization in which they culminate.

Scholastic practice is self-regarding. It has nothing to say to anyone who sees knowledge as indispensable for existential self-orientation. This scholastic deficiency is drastically exposed in the conceptual field of Modernity. It contributes to its sense of intellectual crisis. The automatic mental reflex to historicize an issue occludes what makes it new. As even a cursory glance at, e.g. the *Times Literary Supplement* or the *London Review of Books* confirms, current publications on contemporary politics, society, and culture in conceptualization and structure are totally historicized, – as if historicization were the only permissible cognitive stance, as if it were an acceptable mental habit. What self-delusion to attempt to explain new – unprecedented, unforeseen – issues by means of a conventional form based on recognized precedents, on what with hindsight might have been foreseen. But precisely this is ‘the typical intention of run-of-the-mill academic practice: tracing the unknown back to knowledge already known’ [*l’intention, si typique de l’academica mediocritas, de ramener l’inconnu au déjà connu*] (Bourdieu 1997: 76). But for personal action and social behaviour knowledge thus produced has neither existential nor pragmatic value. Here too modern knowledge fatally declines into redundancy (cf. Davies 2010: 34ff.; 2016a: 132ff.). The result: a culture that has accumulated immense knowledge, – a culture that knows a lot but has learned little. The result: a re-evaluation of the persistence of – or of persisting with – the Enlightenment.

12.

The *fate* of the Enlightenment is paradigmatic of the fate of knowledge in general. That is the thesis advanced here. Demonstrating this requires mapping out the *cognitive situation* that forms it, and defining the scope of the Enlightenment’s *conceptual field*. The aim is to assess its current *value* in terms of its current critical potential. This will depend on it being *adequate* to maintain its intellectually dissident stance and having *sufficient reason* for doing so.

But this thesis can be reversed. Specialized knowledge may well evaluate the Enlightenment for its own historical sake in scholastic self-interest. But the Enlightenment can also be reassessed for the sake of its ever actual, existential value. It then becomes a means – as Kant said – of orientating oneself in one’s thinking, of thereby affirming one’s existence. Thus the thesis – that the fate of the Enlightenment and the fate of knowledge coincide – reformulates the basic question: not the question asking what the Enlightenment is, what it might have been, but what it still does, what it might still do.

Notes

- 1 For the definition of categorical coordinators and examples of their function, see Davies 2010: 167; 2016a: 90–115.
- 2 For further discussion of the principle of identity and tautology, see Davies 2016b: 229ff.
- 3 At the time of drafting this section (February 2018) one issue preoccupying the public mind is the beauty of the oceans and the ugliness of the plastic refuse floating there destroying it.
- 4 The German translation of ‘principle of sufficient reason’ is ‘Satz vom Grund’. This replicates the English word ‘grounds’, as in ‘grounds for belief’, ‘grounds for divorce’.

Introduction

The Enlightenment: A reconception of its fate and value

1. On the Enlightenment's fate and value

(a.) Seeing the Enlightenment as a modernizing transformation of human existence, these essays are about the social value of knowledge. They are not meant as an introduction to the Enlightenment itself as a historically categorized 'process'. For this a multitude of information sources already exists: increasing it is senseless. These essays review neither the reception of the Enlightenment nor its historiography. That only affirms scholastic connoisseurship, the standard academic attitude. Rather they are about the capacity of knowledge to re-evaluate already existing values, such as producing (as with Kant) a 'Copernican turn', or (as with Nietzsche) a 'transvaluation of all values' [*Umwertung aller Werte*], or (as with Scheler) an investigation into 'values being overturned' [*Vom Umsturz der Werte*]. They are, in other words, essays in axiology.

These essays propose that the Enlightenment offers a paradigm of knowledge re-evaluating itself through its internal logic, its value depending on its capacity for re-evaluating itself. They also, therefore, offer a paradigm of the fate of knowledge-structures, of what happens to them as they undergo successive, persistent re-evaluations. In particular they also explore a knowledge-structure, a knowledge-potential, that – like any knowledge-structure or potential – can be re-evaluated in terms of (or because of) its wider cultural implications. Consequently, these essays focus less on identifying the truth of the Enlightenment, on saying what it was or might be, than on assessing its worth, its ongoing appreciation, or on investigating the resentment it induces. Truth (e.g. the truth of the Enlightenment) is, after all, 'just' a value, as much vulnerable as incontrovertible, however much it affirms certainty and dispels illusion. It demonstrates in the concept of value, in its own value, the axiological basis of knowledge, of the relationship between mind and world constituted by the development and appreciation of the values culture produces.¹

In other words, the whole field of knowledge is predicated on values, the expression of a plethora of interests and commitments. (Even value-free science is asserted as a cognitive value meant to invalidate tendentious knowledge-structures.) As a cognitive norm, as a criterion of identity, truth would be comprehensive. But as a value – as an appeal for appreciation, a

focus of interest, a solicitation of commitment – truth is pragmatic, worth advocating, to be enacted, the product of the will [*Wille*] (to use a term from Schopenhauer and from Eduard von Hartmann). In cognitive terms the concept of value sees knowledge as existentially indispensable. It both enlarges existence through knowledge and develops knowledge through existence. This is manifest in a specific social *praxis*: criticism, – itself (as Kant observed) a crucial Enlightenment value, an indispensable Enlightenment *praxis*, but also (as Nietzsche and Scheler demonstrate) a channel for the expression of resentment [*Ressentiment*; *Nachträglichkeit*], itself inciting the inversion or overthrow of existing values.

As Enlightenment thinkers recognized, criticism assays the current value of existing values. It is motivated by values derived from value-systems largely opposing what already exists. It invalidates those that depend uncritically on cultural tradition, intellectual habit, or disciplinary convention. At stake, certainly, is truth, the insistent need to make thought a more adequate reflection of reality (e.g. by ‘thinking for oneself’). At stake too is a different value, expressed by intellectual satisfaction, a personal pleasure afforded by mental adequacy, an existential gratification in producing a new cultural ‘value for the world’ [*Weltwert*] (to use Hartmann’s term), the disclosure of the prospect of new possibilities for human existence. This axiological aspect of knowledge defines value in terms of the quality of the connection between mind and world. It recognizes that the apprehension of an object is accompanied by a feeling, by a conviction, that vindicates its appreciation. Conversely, a judgement about reality is evaluated by how adequately it covers the wider circumstances it addresses. In this situation, therefore, how knowledge is valued and who evaluates it determine its fate, – as the case of the Enlightenment demonstrates.

(b.) The essays here undertaking this reconception of the Enlightenment contend that it exemplifies its cognitive capacity for evaluating itself, that it offers a set of values meant to keep re-evaluating themselves. But, to re-introduce from the beginning a certain negative tone, they also reflect on whether or not the mind – specifically the modern Enlightenment mind – is adequate for bringing about and managing the radical re-evaluations inherent (in theory) in its mental capacity and driving its own inherent logic. The mind operates now in (what Cornelius Castoriadis calls) a ‘fragmented world’ [*monde morcelé*], in circumstances arising from heterogeneous values and ideas, the ever-accumulating outcomes of its ultimately flawed performances [*parapraxis*; *Fehlleistung*]. In the last analysis, the Enlightenment is just one knowledge-structure, one set of values, within this heterogeneity, left to its fate in the ‘immense field of ruins’ [*unermeßliches Trümmerfeld*] of obsolete, invalidated philosophical systems (cf. Dilthey 1961: 82), amongst the ‘stony rubbish’ and ‘broken images’ strewn across the cultural ‘wasteland’ that is Modernity.

But there are reasons for this initial, negative logic. Negation does have ‘creative meaning’ [*schöpferische Bedeutung*] (cf. Scheler 1955a: 58). Here it means the present argument avoids automatically – habitually, unthinkingly – conforming

to a historicizing methodology. It needs to be stressed: human beings are distinctive for their capacity to dissent from the reality they experience, for not being obliged to accept ‘approaches’ to issues as they are conventionally offered (cf. Scheler 1978: 55). The resistance reality offers the dissenting intention raises consciousness, intensifies thinking, concentrates it on what is of value. Animating the mind in its culturally creative work, this reflex makes transvaluation indispensable. Negation, therefore, keeps the world open, capable of being reconceived. It opposes in particular a mentally coercive, constantly self-historicizing world. It dissents from a world where, because things were the way they were, they already are the way they have got to be – and where, because things already are the way they have got to be, they pre-emptively occlude what in future they might become.

(c.) The present argument focusses on the Enlightenment, on its fate not just in Modernity, but *as* Modernity. Negation bolsters its dissidence. Facing a persistent, affirmatively academic consensus, this argument defaults to reservation. Academic experts may well claim ever ‘better’ comprehension. They are oblivious to the fact that ‘we shall never be able to claim final knowledge of anything whatsoever’ (cf. Bateson 2002: 25). Here negation signals apprehension. It motivates re-orientation and transvaluation. It, therefore, blocks the identitary thinking that historical research relies on for its objects to remain the way they were and history itself to be the way it was, – as in the following example:

In 1970 Peter Gay asserted: ‘[I]t is only when we know *what the Enlightenment was* that we can adequately understand what it can still do’ (Gay 1970: 155 (my italics)); in 2013 Anthony Pagden reviews the Enlightenment’s ‘legacy’ to explain ‘why it is not only of professional interest to historians. [...] why it still matters. And why it is important to understand just *what it was*’ (Pagden 2013: xiv (my italics)). Between these statements some forty years have passed. They affirm identitary logic, the tautology that the Enlightenment was what it was. The result? They immobilize interest. The key evaluative term here is ‘legacy’. It comes already signifying historicization. It implies not only that the donor (in this case the Enlightenment) is deceased, but also that the historian is its principal beneficiary. It results from the historicizing preconception re-classifying the Enlightenment, finding a substitute for it. However, through its historicization the Enlightenment loses its capacity for dynamic self-transvaluation. It leaves historians with the task of having to revive it, hence their recourse to saying ‘what it was’, discussing whether ‘it matters’. But neither the historians’ ‘administrative gaze’ commanding the panorama of the past nor their academic-managerial supervision of disciplinary knowledge in the present is capable of asserting Enlightenment values. These emerge from within the knowledge-structure, from the self-transvaluations it itself unfolds, not from an external, comprehensive vantage-point. This means that anyone committed to, or appreciative of, Enlightenment thinking has no need to be told ‘what it was’ or why it ‘matters’. They know that. They have known that since they began to think for themselves. They already know how to

distinguish it from the conceptual complacency underpinning disciplinary knowledge. That motivates their commitment to the Enlightenment. In any case, the only means of recognizing its transvaluating potential is (as mentioned earlier) to act on it with pragmatic conviction.

That is not to say the historical and historicizing perspective lacks any value. Reiterating ‘what the Enlightenment was’, why it ‘still matters’ over a gap of four decades does suggest the existence of a value-system of some kind: the cognitive value superimposed on it by the ‘professional historian’, a value deemed by him or her as worthy for broadcast to a wider, less professional social community. In this respect too ‘legacy’ is pivotal. Re-classifying the Enlightenment knowledge-structure as a focus for professional interests, it facilitates this wider dissemination. Its value, its historicizing value, is as a categorical coordinator, – a rhetorical device, applied *a priori* by the historian to create the temporal continuity sustaining identitary thinking. Accordingly it coordinates Peter Gay in 1970 with Anthony Pagden in 2013, the eighteenth with the twenty-first century, historical knowledge with historicized social self-knowledge. It is a means of organizing existing knowledge rather than an incentive for re-evaluating its critical potential.

Certainly between Gay and Pagden differences exist. These amount, however, just to variants of the same old thing. In terms of the ecology of mind, history offers cognitive stability based on comprehensive continuity. However, determined to be comprehensive, it must be receptive to heterogeneity. It needs to contextualize the randomness of incidents that provokes change. Immersed in this polyvalent instability, in this heterogeneity, history dedicates itself to producing stabilizing, comprehensive variants of the self-same. Accordingly, it dispenses with the logic inherent in the Enlightenment’s constant self-evaluation. Instead, it finds its essential, comprehensive self-amplification in the mosaic patterns it assembles through coordinating the random, heterogeneous data it has accumulated. In these circumstances, in an already historicized world, to write the history of the Enlightenment is tantamount to writing its obituary.

(d.) The essays here, therefore, concentrate on a structural fault in current historical reflection on the Enlightenment. Recognizing that cultural development required and demonstrated cognitive enhancement, the Enlightenment saw its own value as progressive. To realize its ethical and social values, it projected them onto its conception of the future (as with Louis-Sébastien Mercier in *L’An 2440. Rêve s’il en fut jamais* [*In the Year 2440. A Dream If Ever There Was*] (1771)). It is sustained by ‘naïve historicism’. By contrast, in some forty years the historical quest to define the Enlightenment’s identity has hardly budged, – the consequence of the ‘sophistical historicism’ driving current historical reflection. Both forms of historicism involve identitary thinking, both cultivate self-sameness (tautology), both are illusory (*illusio*).² However, the ‘naïve’ form permits the present then, the Enlightenment (in other words), to identify itself with humanity as a whole, to affirm cultural development as a means of existential self-enhancement. The ‘sophistical’ form is complex, not least because it has forsaken

this conviction. It relies – again as already shown – on a tautological conceit coordinated by ‘legacy’. It presumes on the flimsy basis of purely temporal continuity, of accidental sequentiality, that the present now is the Enlightenment’s future, what subsequently became of it, what it got to be. The current, desolate human predicament would, therefore, also be its ‘legacy’. In defining the Enlightenment’s identity current Enlightenment historiography would confront a prototype of itself. In the past’s tarnished mirror it contemplates its unfathomable self-image. It finds in its naïve inadequacies then, at that time, symptoms of disorientated Modernity here and now. On this identity scholastic connoisseurship perpetuates a self-affirming illusion of historical veracity. ‘Naïve historicism’ asserted the self-interests of the Enlightenment, the progressive realization of its life-enhancing intentions. ‘Sophistical historicism’, defining what in Modernity the Enlightenment ‘can still do’, ‘why it still matters’, just affirms – as already demonstrated – historians’ own professional interests, their own professional values, that vindicate their conceptual complacency.

Negative logic fulfils another purpose: negation comprises the Enlightenment’s negative thinking. Most radically it denounces things as they are, – as when D’Holbach, e.g. remarked; ‘all men are sick, birth immediately exposes them to the contagion of error’ [*tous les hommes sont malades, la naissance les livre aussitôt à la contagion de l’erreur*] (D’Holbach 2008: 210; I, 16). This negativity, the diagnosis of the (psycho-) pathological character of human sociability, taps into a fundamental cultural tropism producing its own conceptual field, – as evinced in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1651), Kierkegaard’s analysis of despair in *Sickness unto Death* (1849), Nietzsche’s description of the ‘last man’ in *Also sprach Zarathustra* [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*] (1883–1886), Freud’s insights into a pervasive social nervousness in *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens* [*On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life*] (1904), Scheler’s ‘sick animal with a hereditary mental illness’ [*das ‘erblich kranke Tier’*] in ‘Zur Idee des Menschen’ [*On the Idea of Man*] (1914), or Benasayag and Schmit’s *Les passions tristes. Souffrance psychique et crise sociale* [*Sad Passions. Mental Illness and Social Crisis*] (2003) (with its allusion to Spinoza). This tropism hardly indicates ‘historical continuity’. Instead, it indicates a persistent anthropic inadequacy. But it also offered the Enlightenment the idea of a therapeutic culture to remedy this congenital malaise. It affirms the conviction, perhaps most evident in Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*, that, because it provides the resources for us ‘to have the power to be ourselves our own physicians’, philosophy ‘applies an effective medicine for diseases of souls’ (Cicero 1996: 230–1; §III: iii: 6; 392–3 §IV: xxvii: 58). The Enlightenment would correct the inadequacy of human institutions. It saw restorative moral benefits in intellectual autonomy and the rational organization of culture, society, and state. Fixated on anthropocentrism, however, it also risked its pathogenic side-effect, – nihilism.

(e.) Enlightenment history in its sophistical, modern form, therefore, deludes itself if its ‘legacy’ is a distillate of ‘what it was’ and ‘why it matters’, as though it were still therapeutically effective. The past does offer a tarnished mirror.

The spirit of utopia the Enlightenment then embodied has indeed vanished. Historians now peering into it lack a clear view. Representing the later culture receiving the Enlightenment ‘legacy’ leaves them unconscious of themselves as being sophistically historicized. Expertly juggling with established disciplinary ‘traditions’ of Enlightenment research remains their main pre-occupation.

But Modernity, this late culture, with its historicized historical self-consciousness is also left intellectually entropic, morally debilitated. Intoxicated – over the last three hundred years or so – with ultimately ineffective cultural and political ‘therapies’ (i.e. absolutism, authoritarianism, democracy, fascism, totalitarianism, populism), its projects for self-regeneration culminate in disorientation. With its self-historicization, in coming afterwards, coping with its sense of aftermath, the intimation of epilogue, inhibited by these pre-emptive occlusions of its future, it cannot help envisaging its decline.

Modernity is a state of terminal morbidity. Such different thinkers as Spengler or Valéry showed that cultures have their own biological life-span or simply collapse under their own self-imposed historical burdens. So, particularly with its contrasting, rationally vindicated, ethical idealism, the Enlightenment as a cultural value suffers from vindictive, retributive re-evaluations [*Nachträglichkeit*] sophistically produced by a later traumatized, inextricably historicized historical consciousness. In this morbid aftermath resentment festers. What was once accepted as a social or cultural good mutates into liability or disadvantage. One strategy for making them manageable has historians reading present ideological values into what it terms their Enlightenment ‘precedents’. Another highlights the inconsistencies between the *philosophes*’ theories and values and their personal life practices (e.g. Voltaire’s anti-Semitism sinks his advocacy of toleration; Rousseau writes a treatise on bringing up children but sends his own to an orphanage; Marx is financially supported by Engels the factory-owner, etc.). It forgets that ‘the various components of the person are differently – and sometimes inconsistently – socialized’ in a modern society consisting of ‘multi-polar situations’ and a person’s ‘multiple participations’ in it (cf. Mannheim 2014a: 44, 48). It dismissively insinuates that theory, conjecture, aspiration – buoyed up with sufficient reason – must come blighted with hypocrisy. It would thereby disqualify itself. So neither a feasibility study of its idealism nor disciplinary-technical ratification imposed by the ‘human sciences’ does the Enlightenment’s value justice. That requires something more, something existential, something related to one’s cognitive situation [*savoir-être*].

2. The Enlightenment as ‘general intellect’

(a.) Evaluating the Enlightenment involves the politics of culture. Then, as immediate political dissidence, its intellectual stance required public expression and entailed social consequences (such as exile or imprisonment). Now, its value derives from various political persuasions apparently originating in

it, yet viewing it as its dubious ‘bequest’, – as in (e.g.): Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (1981) on the groundlessness of Enlightenment ethics; John Gray’s *Enlightenment’s Wake* (1995), an excursion into cultural pessimism; David Stove’s *On Enlightenment* (2003), its ultra-conservative antipathy for its basic principles; let alone the cultural and political liberalism (exemplified amongst others by Wilhelm von Humboldt, John Stuart Mill, John Henry Cardinal Newman, Matthew Arnold, Isaiah Berlin) that resists its rationally reductive conception of human capabilities or (as with Martha Nussbaum and Steven Pinker) offers a frill of moral ethos to global capitalism.

This politicization is inevitable. The Enlightenment has woven itself into the *Lebenswelt* as a rationalizing, disenchanting attitude. In *Signs of the Times* (1829) Carlyle identified as Mechanism the cultural and behavioural predisposition of an Age of Machinery. Later (1857–1858) Marx called it ‘general intellect’, the knowledge-function that designates the knowledge that for its own development a society needs and controls, a society values. With production driven by machines both as ‘fixed capital’ and as ‘the objectified force of knowledge’ [*vergegenständliche Wissenskraft*], ‘as hand-made organs of the human brain’ [*von der menschlichen Hand geschaffne Organe des menschlichen Hirns*], knowledge itself has become an ‘immediate force of production’ [*zur unmittelbaren Produktivkraft*] (Marx 1953: 594). Marx confirms that this purposive, instrumental knowledge is meant to sustain material production. It also conceptualizes cultural reality as deriving from or motivating production. Moreover, it ensures a certain economic and cognitive adequacy with its convergence in the work-place of what one knows and how one acts.

More importantly, the concepts of ‘Mechanism’ and ‘general intellect’ confirm that mind does not just define a subjective cognitive capacity, – as personified by prominent thinkers who advocate Enlightenment values. It also manifests itself ecologically in information-systems, schemes of communication between individuals and between individuals and their environment, in the social and cultural recourse to familiar cognitive and behavioural procedures. In other words, we may say that “mind” is immanent in those circuits of the brain which are complete within the brain. Or that mind is immanent in circuits which are complete within the system, brain *plus* body. Or, finally, that mind is immanent within the larger system – man *plus* environment (Bateson 2000: 317). Further still, seen in Hegelian terms as realized in the totality of its self-knowledge, mind manifests itself ‘in the virtual assemblage of the interconnections preprogrammed and predetermined by the universe of intelligent machines. [...] the final point of modern *Rationalisierung*’ (Berardi 2009: 73).

Now, however they may be conceived, mind, knowledge, and their technical application are implicit in the rational organization of social behaviour: millions upon millions of people across the planet performing identical actions based on learned procedures: starting their car-engines, answering their phones, logging on to computers, absorbed in social media, conforming to organizational procedures, protocols, and guidelines, etc. ‘Mechanism’ drives

the instrumentalization of knowledge. This manages the technosphere and its development and administration: the evolution of *homo sapiens*' digital exoskeleton. It demonstrates the socio-economic and cognitive value of technical expertise, particularly its fatal aptitude for knowledge-management. It is immanent in the therapeutic function of knowledge indispensable for physical, mental, and emotional health, the basis of personal autonomy – and an essential remedy for the psychopathology induced by a totally bureaucratized world. It projects socio-political values such as democracy, tolerance, law, justice, evidence, debate, even if they congeal in ideology. It offers meta-social or meta-political reassurance in proposing and developing universal human rights, in promoting action to the benefit of the human species as a whole. Pursued in this situation, affected by its atmosphere, the Enlightenment is hardly preserved from political or ideological conflict by historical scholarship. Rather scholarship leaves it defenceless and conflicted.

(b.) In these ways the Enlightenment pervades society's 'general intellect'. But, given the heterogeneity of facts and values in a historicized world, it is also fragmented. To put it bluntly, the *philosophe* – historically the Enlightenment's principal agent – has no direct, current successor. Intellectual work is in conflict with itself between its usually venal instrumentalization and its thereby already compromised self-reflection. Particularly from a Postmodern perspective, the universal values – humanity, nature, liberty, etc. – he or she represented have broken down. His or her self-appointed entitlement to represent them seems increasingly hollow (cf. Lyotard 1984: 12ff., 21). His or her function breaks down into many different types of intellectual work, especially with the aspiration to achieve total comprehension. Where this is historical, the current academic function would like to believe it itself promotes Enlightenment. But this is an illusion of sophisticated historicism. A quite different knowledge-structure sustains the academic function now. Far from endorsing Enlightenment, scholastic connoisseurship allied with technical expertise, precisely – paradoxically – through aiming for total comprehension, works occlusively. The inevitable *amplification* involves producing ever more of the same, occurring as it does as its *atomization*. But the reiterated amplification of atomized sameness mutates into something *ephemeral*: cognitive interest soon declines, becoming just one more research trend. In particular the Enlightenment dissolves into countless tessellated patterns, – a plethora of localized 'Enlightenments'. What conceptually it might mean collapses, testifying to its self-induced inadequacy, – as even the scholastic connoisseur concedes: '[T]he unrestricted definition of Enlightenment, or its alternative, the admission that there were multiple Enlightenments, has rendered the subject so blurred and indeterminate that it is impossible to reach any assessment of its historical significance' (Robertson 2005: 43).

(c.) Ironically, being pervasive in its fragmented form in a historicized world of heterogeneous facts and values seems to vindicate the Enlightenment as sophisticated historicism reconstructs it. No wonder: sophisticated historicism offers

more knowledge of the Enlightenment than the Enlightenment had of itself. It knows what – historically speaking – happened afterwards. In its aftermath its subsequent ramifications expose its inadequacies. Sophistical historicism comes with the conviction that present knowledge is superior to that available to the Enlightenment, – in fact, more enlightened. In a historicized world disciplinary-technical knowledge comes with the conceit that its diagnostic oversight – as the *latest* thing – is cognitively privileged. But far from indicating continuity, naïve historicism then and its sophistical version now result from ruptures between knowledge paradigms and thought-styles within the transvaluation of values the Enlightenment produces. Material and technological progress hardly automatically implies an improved quality of thought. Once, besides Kant’s ‘guardians’, a search engine and algorithms do your thinking for you, it can equally signify cognitive degeneration. Cultural commentators such as Ortega y Gasset and Valéry were justifiably apprehensive. As the administrative complexity of the world increases so the number of technicians capable of managing it decreases. Thought cannot anticipate itself, so a world produced by the mind eludes its existing, let alone its future comprehension.

(d.) Further, this situation reverses the relationship between Enlightenment and Modernity. Now the Enlightenment mutates into a test of modern knowledge: a measure of its social commitment; a trial of its intellectual motivation; proof of its ethical intention, an inducement to commit itself to its idealism; or even a gauge of its decline. Accordingly the essays here would define not what the Enlightenment *was*, but what it *does*, – not just as the effects produced by it as their cause, but the ramifications of its very existence. In this sense, the Enlightenment as a form of Modernity would seem an ‘incomplete project’ (cf. Habermas 1981). But not because it projected the ideal of infinite progress and unending social and moral improvement. This would condemn people always to live at a time in the world that, as they knew, might well be more enlightened than its past, but – dispiritingly – never as enlightened as it might be in future. Nor is it because of its conflicting social, cultural, and aesthetic values. These may well constitute Modernity but still leave it inherently conflicted and disorientated. Rather the Enlightenment would be incomplete not just because its capacity for self-transvaluation would be unlimited, but because its self-transvaluation would be an always present act of renovation. It would reveal Enlightenment idealism as always immanent in the social and cultural environment. If it could ever be completed, the Enlightenment as Modernity would be deemed not just to have lost all cultural value, but to have exhausted any remaining value it might have had for itself. The principle of hope would have melted away, irretrievably.

In particular, as a *historical topic*, the way it was what it was, the Enlightenment exposes the inadequacy of scholastic connoisseurship expressed through sophistical historicism. This scholasticism obstructs any convergence between knowledge and behaviour, thought and action. As with Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) or with Steven Pinker in *Enlightenment Now. The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (2018), knowledge merely ratifies

current behaviour, thought offers no impediment to the usual action, to going through with the same old thing. As a current topic now, the Enlightenment's sophisticated historicist reconceptions do not just dwell on its instrumentalization of knowledge, but also exploit its susceptibility to various kinds of ideological manipulation. Projected back onto the Enlightenment, these historicized reconceptions in their conflicted heterogeneity still inexorably invalidate it.

3. Modernity: The Enlightenment invalidated

(a.) Modernity, therefore, is the Enlightenment gone to seed, like a plant that has 'bolted' or 'gone over'. Its blooms have faded; it withers and dries. The seed pods may have cracked; the seeds themselves will have drifted with the Modernist wind. Even so, its main stems might still assert vitality; wherever its seed settles something seminal might materialize. Even if the world now is 'fully enlightened' (which is doubtful), it surely 'beams under the sign of disaster triumphant' [*die vollends aufgeklärte Erde strahlt im Zeichen triumphalen Unheils*] (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 7). But the situation is more banal. Unable to dispel its atmosphere of *ennui* and splenetic despondency, Modernity is rather the Enlightenment's exhausted end-phase, – as it must be for sophisticated historicism locating it at its own 'threshold'. Defined by Modernity and its Postmodern ramifications, the current cognitive situation is unavoidable. The historical continuity sophisticated historicism presupposes is in any case illusory. Access to the Enlightenment now goes only through current (i.e. Modernist) configurations of its finality: *existential inadequacy (including mental inadequacy)*; *temporal rupture (including the synchronous coincidence of asynchronicities)*; *the heterogeneity of cultural values and the fragmented specialization of intellectual work*.

These are diverse symptoms of the psychopathology of historicized life, Modernity's determining characteristic. Driven by progress, lacking past precedent, so consigning its past to history, Modernity appears as already historicized, – as the term itself confirms. It is a culture that historicizes itself compulsively, orientated as it is towards the ever-latest thing, thereby rendering its precedents and eventually itself obsolete, a culture (in other words) 'where the past continues as the destruction of the past' [*Heute aber setzt die Vergangenheit sich fort als Zerstörung der Vergangenheit*] (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 4). In the end it is a culture taken hostage by its own fatality, by its own 'epistemological error [...] often reinforced and therefore self-validating' (cf. Bateson 2000: 486). The essays presented here see in these symptoms final, *fatal* effects of the Enlightenment, what the Enlightenment has ended up doing. They also propose that unless the Enlightenment proves its vitality, capable of re-evaluating itself, it will be historicized, removed ever further into what Ernst Bloch called the 'remoteness of the preterite'.

(b.) *Existential inadequacy* questions 'Man' – and with that the concept of humanity – as the cornerstone of knowledge. Meant to oppose a theocentric conception of the world, this anthropic principle proves too heterogeneous to

form a dependable premise. It also recognizes that ‘humanity’ is an abstraction, – at least a ‘zoological concept’, probably a cosmological exception, definitely an existential eccentricity. So its claim to a comprehensive understanding of its own situation reduces to partial conclusions in its own interests. Certainly a ‘zoological concept’ of humanity could be synonymous with a ‘human species’ identifiable as a ‘mega-organism’ capable of directing itself to its eventual intellectual and moral perfection. But this is a dubious conception. All life-forms have their own biologically determined life-span. To believe that the human species’ existence would be historically extendable indefinitely would be an anthropic conceit. Long before it had even approached its putative self-realization, it could be gone, un-self-fulfilled. Projections such as these, realized through instrumental knowledge, close down the intrusion of possible random elements essential for the wider environmental system the human species develops in, but not indispensable for the species itself. They reveal ‘the curious twist in the systemic nature of the individual man whereby consciousness is, almost of necessity, blinded to the systemic nature of the man himself’ (cf. Bateson 2000: 440). History’s projection of the past onto the future, the affirmation of the way things are as resulting from the way they were, is, therefore, a cognitive pre-emption of the future, the suppression both of hitherto unsuspected existential possibilities and of indispensable existential apprehensions.

Though affirming the human presence, the science of ‘Man’ cannot, therefore, dispel the existential precarity it induces. The more its existential and mental capacities appear inadequate, the more the Enlightenment seeks self-assurance. But the dark foil that offsets the science of ‘Man’, that enhances the value of humanity, is not religion but its opposite: not atheism still cognate with theism, but nihilism. Nihilism haunts Modernity, the Enlightenment gone to seed, be it in the terror of cosmic desolation evoked by Pascal in his *Pensées* (1670); be it in Richter’s nightmarish vision (1796/1818) of the dead Christ on His ascension discovering that God had never existed; be it in Nietzsche’s realization (in the 1880s) that the heterogeneity of atomized values annihilates the very concept of value.

Nevertheless, modern purposiveness proposes remedial strategies against its ultimate nihilism: the recourse to sameness (tautology) and the practice of critique. As a symbol of universality, ‘Man’ may well be a pointless abstraction. Nevertheless, human social and cultural behaviour evinces a certain ‘sameness’, – a concept produced by total comprehension and signifying universalizing thought. It manifests itself in conceptually similar forms even if their appearance or content differs. Dryden, in 1700, comparing the characters peopling Chaucer’s world with those in his own, concluded: ‘[M]ankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of Nature, though everything is altered’ (Dryden 1912: 16). D’Alembert remarked in 1751 that ‘all our knowledge can be reduced to sensations which are roughly the same in all Men’ [*qui sont à peu près les mêmes dans tous les hommes*]. This was meant to give sameness a secure anthropological-behavioural foundation (D’Alembert 2011a: 89).

However, Tocqueville in *De la démocratie en Amérique II* (1840) identifies a crucial consequence of ‘sameness’ as a political value of democratic society. The authoritative individual declines as the power of the mass increases, so that the world is increasingly governed by public opinion. The outcome is ambivalent: sameness both deprives the individual of faith in others yet confirms his or her trust in the public as a whole; the individual might well experience being the equal of anyone else but is overcome by his or her insignificance in the public sphere. Hence a democratic society has a far more effective source of power than its aristocratic counterpart: it imposes its beliefs psychologically by means of the immense pressure of the public mind on the mentality of each individual (Tocqueville 1992: 521). But this contention declines into Musil’s insight in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* [*The Man Without Qualities*] (1930ff.) – (i.e.) someone lacking any personally differentiating characteristics – that ‘most people today are the same’ [*die meisten Menschen sind heute ähnlich*] because they have succumbed to a pervasive moral apathy and social indifference (Musil 1978: 900). Transcending heterogeneity through universality, sameness underpins unending cultural diversity and its random configurations, the heterogeneity of values (as in Dumarsais’ and Montesquieu’s conception of the moral scope of the *philosophe*). Conversely, the conviction of human ‘sameness’ derives from a purely scientific deduction abstracted from the diversity of everyday experience.

By contrast, critique concedes *a priori* the congenital inadequacy of human cognitive capability. Its function is, therefore, also compensatory. It offers provisional occasions for reconstructing propositions, formulating new projects, refining arguments, conjecturing new values, building a pragmatic consensus. It produces contingent certainties. Kant demonstrates its exemplary form: the work of reason subjected to public rational review since it expects to be corrected or enhanced only by reason itself. On this basis he dismantled natural theology since it credited pure reason with an illusory, self-deceiving cognitive reach, formulated the moral law capable of regulating itself within its own limits without recourse to any transcendental principle or authority, and asserted the creation of culture, a socio-political sphere of purely human tastes and interests, superimposed on Nature. Certainly, the infinity of the universe, let alone the human capacity to conceive of the existence of God, cannot be denied and might even be inspirational. But what exceeds the scope of human cognitive capacity cannot support human autonomy. Thus Kant turns mental inadequacy and existential precarity to human advantage through constant socio-cultural elaboration. Existential inadequacy is ultimately resolved not by any specific (dogmatic) meaning, but by expressing conviction in the inherent value of the undertaking, by the basic pragmatic principle remaining to support personal autonomy: that in any act ‘our faith beforehand in an uncertified result is the only thing that makes the result come true’ (James 1956: 59). Based on one’s trust in one’s own vital needs, pragmatist motivation ensures that the instinctive search for meaning confirms the meaning one is searching for: – that there actually is a meaning to search for.

(c.) *Temporal rupture* disputes an evaluation of the Enlightenment that is purely academic-historical, hence managerial and administrative. In particular, it challenges the deep-seated academic notion that defining the Enlightenment first requires an ‘historical context’. Saying what it was necessitates cleansing it of all its circumstantial philosophical accretions since the eighteenth century (cf. Ferrone 2015: 57ff.; Pečar and Tricoire 2015). This ploy is a classic case of definition eliminating from the start whatever makes itself problematic. From the standpoint of the Enlightenment’s finality these accumulating accretions affirm its persistence, its cultural ramifications, its very sense, its enduring value.

This common conviction of historians of the Enlightenment needs challenging. They typically concede that its eighteenth-century moral idealism has by now, in the twenty-first century, become tarnished, compromised by its internal contradictions. Any current survey of the world makes such a judgement self-evident. But they then attribute this moral inadequacy to the Enlightenment itself, treating it as a ‘false friend’ for not providing the ‘world we want’ (cf. Pečar and Tricoire 2015; Loudon 2010). Certainly, the Enlightenment subverts itself if its ethical ideals and social utility fail to converge. But culture in itself is predicated on rupture. Far from being a ‘legacy’, a recognized value for scholastic connoisseurs, it contains ‘the potential for alienation [...], the ferment for rupture or at least dissent’ [*la puissance d’aliénation [...], le ferment de rupture, au moins de contestation*] (cf. Damisch 1976: 34, 41).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the Enlightenment too is based on rupture. That Modernity connects the Enlightenment with the present by means of continuity seems untenable. Rather Modernity offers a field of heterogeneous elements and values, deep structural rifts, that conceptually pertain to both the Enlightenment and itself, the present: there they co-exist. The Enlightenment itself is a scene of ruptures and heterogeneity. It comprises, e.g. a range of conflicting philosophical and political values: both La Mettrie’s materialism and Berkeley’s idealism; Hume’s scepticism and Leibniz’s theism; Hobbes’s authoritarianism and Saint-Just’s radical republicanism. More than this the Enlightenment itself is divided between being a historical ‘period’ with its particular significance invested in a historical process and an experimental, cultural-philosophical concept. If it feeds a European historicist trend, it still splits apart, offers release [*Ausgang*] from its inertial momentum so that human beings can reclaim their cognitive independence.

Further, the Enlightenment attempts to reconcile two conflicted components: its ideal moral aspirations and its material social effects, existentially self-reflective knowledge and its instrumental exploitation. This fissure produces a self-destructive logic. Material progress, because it is progressive, annihilates what it progressively produces: ‘[A] prolonged prosperity is suicidal, and progress inevitably destroys itself by mere progression’ (Pattison 1877: 357). Uncoupled from its ethical claims, the Enlightenment defaults to the possibility of destroying the human sphere. The self-destruction of progress is surely a definition of a self-historicizing world, breaking with its progressive precedents, driven

by transvaluation. Ironically, the anthropocentric Enlightenment thus contributes to a stronger, self-incriminating cultural tendency, a self-historicizing propensity inherent in the technological and socio-economic pursuit of the ever-latest thing, driven on by global capitalism, that renders human existence *per se* ‘antiquated’. For if ethics cannot keep pace with material development, it looks obsolete, ineffective, but above all an impediment to subsequent material progress, to subsequent progressive, the very latest, historicizations. What seemed a utopian ideal mutates into its opposite: the culture of the death-drive, searching for ends for its technocratic means. No wonder then a certain resignation pervades Carlyle’s critique of the material progress and concomitant administrative capacity that defines the Age of Machinery: This [...] is the grand characteristic of our age. By our skill in Mechanism, it has come to pass, that in the management of external things we excel all other ages; while in whatever respects the pure moral nature, in true dignity of soul and character, we are perhaps inferior to most civilized ages (Carlyle 1857: 111). For the Enlightenment this fundamental diremption between technological potential and moral capacity proves absolutely fatal if it fails to induce a re-evaluation of its values.

In essence, historical continuity – specifically a production of narrative in respect of alleged ‘historical connections’, particularly those between the Enlightenment and the present – is an illusion [*illusio*]. As Gregory Bateson observes: ‘Lineal thinking will always generate either the teleological fallacy (that end determines process) or the myth of some supernatural controlling agency’ (Bateson 2002: 56). For the presumption of lineal continuity from the eighteenth century ‘up to’ the present, the conceptual field of Modernity substitutes patterns of rupture. Historical continuity – both a parasite on the passage of time and the basis of transcendental or providential historicist designs – already splits into ‘naïve’ and ‘sophistical’ forms of historicism. ‘Naïve historicism’ structures the present as a hinge connecting the Enlightenment’s self-understanding with the past, particularly with Classical Greek and Roman culture, and projecting it onto the future as the eventual perfection of the human species as a whole. ‘Sophistical historicism’, the outcome of historical methodology historicizing itself, sustains current academic practice. Combining scholastic connoisseurship with technical specialization, it receives the Enlightenment as an acknowledged cultural value, even if a flawed or inadequate achievement [*parapraxis*]. The scholastic fixation on the Enlightenment’s identity produces the conceptual framework and ‘historical context’ for its recurrent evaluation, for re-assessing ‘what it was’. But ‘sophistical historicism’ is itself the product of this self-same Modernity. To cope with Modernity’s propensity for permanent self-historicization, for ensuring that it always will be what it really was, it *must* keep re-assessing the Enlightenment’s historical value.

The rupture between these two forms of historicism confirms ‘sophistical historicism’ as symptomatic of Modernity. It sees itself in the Enlightenment’s

beginning, poised as that is on its distant 'threshold'. And surveying its own historical achievement, it cannot deny that its connoisseurship and expertise informing its assessment of the Enlightenment's intrinsic value have also contributed to the pathogenic culture of Modernity with its heterogenous values and asynchronous tendencies. As any bibliography of the history of the Enlightenment confirms, the amplification, atomization, and ephemeralization of disciplinary historical knowledge produces a fragmented culture, a culture of manifold ruptures in its self-understanding. Far from having any cultural-diagnostic purpose, 'sophistical historicism' is itself symptomatic of the Enlightenment going to seed. It manifests the ruptured structure otherwise concealed by its façade of consistent historicist design. The Enlightenment is, therefore, the expression of rupture inevitable when cultural forms undergo transvaluation, – as when Carlyle (again in 1829) observes: 'The time is sick and out of joint. [...] There is a deep-lying struggle in the whole fabric of society; a boundless grinding collision of the New with the Old' (Carlyle 1857: 117).

Enlightenment and Modernity are interdependent: the Enlightenment is Modernity 'in bloom' and Modernity the Enlightenment declining. *Existential inadequacy* and *temporal rupture* bind them together. Further, these categories of *parapraxis* produce apprehension. They block the reassurance supposed to come through comprehensive understanding based on traditions of continuity. Instead, they expose the threat of nihilism. They reveal culture – specifically modern, enlightened culture – as disruptive. Moreover, with its capacity for generating random configurations Modernity only makes self-orientation more difficult.

(d.) The *heterogeneity of cultural values* signifies a fundamental issue: what happens to knowledge in Modernity? It focusses on the precarious cognitive situation of the social knowledge-function (i.e. the intelligentsia, the cognitariat). It relies on a public sphere and its multifarious cultural, social, and political dimensions for producing and disseminating a society's self-knowledge, its general intellect. But in thus interrogating the value of values for the sake of intellectual self-orientation, it also risks provoking its propensity for generating heterogeneous values and, with them, the very intellectual disorientation it would resolve. That defines the dilemma of modern knowledge, of modern intellectual work.

The precarity of this cognitive situation is evident in the lack of a specific term for who or what fulfils its 'knowledge-function'. Ironically, the very agency that would affirm Enlightenment values, that should produce clarity, resists definition. '*Philosophe*' certainly signifies such a function, but so too does the '*savant*' [the scientist], the '*érudits*' [the scholarly], and so too the '*gens de lettres*' [men and women of letters], these latter producing their ideas in private and all the more exposed, therefore, to malevolent misunderstanding by the wider world (cf. Voltaire 1967: 272–4). The intention here, though, is not to re-affirm the *avant-garde* position of significant eighteenth-century thinkers, the default strategy of historical comprehension. Rather, the fate of knowledge is decided by all those exercising the 'knowledge-function'. The group involving

the *philosophe* and his associates could be expanded by including ‘intellectuals’ or the ‘intelligentsia’, including poets, artists, and composers, as a cultural élite, and further still by admitting academic specialists, clerics, trained bureaucrats, resources managers, information engineers, technological innovators, journalists, and cultural and political commentators.³ All these (and similar) types of social cognitive practice generate ways of thinking, keep ideas and values circulating, and review the social attitudes and patterns of behaviour they imply or project. Played out in the public sphere, the social knowledge-function in its various *personae* and multifarious activities both keeps society informed about itself and determines its ideological atmosphere. It commands authority, particularly in the guise of the intellectual. It immediately affects the symbolic dimension, encompassing language, numbers, signs, codes, and narratives, that articulates human experience, that determines its reality. At the same time, it cannot avoid coping with the heterogeneity of social values, the diversity of social behaviour, the pace of technological development, the unconsciously driven trends of mass public opinion.

Still, the term ‘intellectual’ remains indispensable. Crucially, it helps explain what writing does: how it produces, but is also dependent on, systems of information: e.g. the ecology of mind demonstrates that mental capacities, more specifically reason, are not purely subjective, that this subjectivity meshes with wider social and cultural information-systems, given that human beings are ‘language animals’, that human cultural and political existence depends on ‘fictions’ (*inter alia* laws, regulations, reports, testimonies, etc.) constructed from semiotic structures and pre-determined by grammatical rules, – in other words, given that human reality consists of symbolic forms.

Further, intellectuals (in the broadest sense) can be seen as ‘representatives of mind’ [*Repräsentanten des Geistes*], of what repeats itself, what is constant, what is typical [*das sich Wiederholende, Konstante, Typische*], what currently still resonates, becomes the focus of history rather than just the past [*das Vergangene*] (Burckhardt 1969: 6, 213ff.). The state, religion, and culture: according to Burckhardt, these are typically the three constantly recurrent components of history represented by an ‘aristocracy’ of the mind. Comprising artists, poets, philosophers, inventors, and explorers, these are great individuals whose heroic ideas and adventures will echo down the centuries. Along with Athens in the fifth century (BCE), they also offer a cultural ideal by which to evaluate modern culture. The cultural prestige of Classical Athens, a centre of free cultural exchange, gauges the decline of modern cities. These operate instead with commercial transactions; they are currently infested with a ‘mental plague’ [*die jetzige geistige Pest*]: the pursuit of ‘originality’ corresponding ‘to the emotional needs of weary people’ receiving it [*sie entspricht dem Bedürfnisse müder Menschen nach Emotion*]. Thus, as a concentration of cultural activity framed by state, society, religion, and political power, the modern city offers a ‘false environment’. It promotes the various disciplines in the arts and sciences and the interminable studiousness essential for acquiring technical connoisseurship rather than the ‘comprehensive, all-inclusive scope of the mind’ [*Gesamtgeist*]

(Burckhardt 1969: 123–4). It is a sign of Modernity that the concept of mind (as a historical constant in Burckhardt's sense), will be represented by 'great individuals' whose works will continue to resonate but who now come from a heterogeneous (more democratic?) crowd of – *inter alia* – critics, philosophers, scholastic connoisseurs, technical specialists, poets, scientists, artists, and commercial entrepreneurs.

Finally, all these ways in which knowledge circulates inform the 'general intellect'. This instrumentalized knowledge is meant to sustain material production and sustain the cultural reality that affirms it. For this reason the 'general intellect' need not in itself be logically correct or make sense. Certainly, in self-justification it may call itself 'objective', hence 'true', but only because it operates in a social environment constructed by objectified knowledge, knowledge based on objectivity as a recognized cognitive stance, passive, dutiful, and self-effacing, as Nietzsche portrays it in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [*Beyond Good and Evil*] (§207). As instrumentalized knowledge with action and cognition adequately aligned, the general intellect fulfils its productive purpose within its socio-economic system. It need not concern itself with either the unreliability of its epistemologies or its consequences for the world in which it functions.⁴

(e.) In Modernity, therefore, society itself could be construed as a learning environment, be it deliberately affirmative or unconsciously negative. To work successfully in it, the individual requires knowledge for its comprehension. For this reason, though, the individual may apprehend that what he or she knows might never be adequate. These circumstances produce further possibilities. Operating on what its members know, particularly beyond its instrumentalized 'general intellect', hence, on its own self-knowledge – especially if boosted by critical self-reflection or by dialectical negation – a society might attempt to change itself. Conversely, in response to the available social self-knowledge – especially if deterred by prejudice – a society may wish to adhere all the more firmly to itself as it always had been. The transvaluation of values the Enlightenment implies produces these conflicts, their motivation, but also their frustration.

Society as a learning environment vindicating the transvaluation of values is typically represented in Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* [*Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*] [1686]. It consists of nocturnal conversations between the philosopher and a beautiful *marquise* as they stroll through the park in her country estate. Even though untutored in philosophy and cosmology, she is motivated to learn by her theoretical curiosity. Her desire to appreciate the universe demonstrates the philosopher's conviction that knowledge is indispensable for anyone wishing to understand their own existential circumstances, particularly the world they live in. 'Nothing', he says, 'should be of greater interest than to know how the world we live in came about and if there are any that might be the same' [*rien ne devait nous intéresser davantage que de savoir comment est fait ce monde que nous habitons, s'il y a d'autres mondes semblables*] (Fontenelle 1973: 19). As the product of technical expertise, science might well disenchant the world. But re-evaluated as a dialectical form of

social behaviour, it is enriched by conversation. The result is: it reviews both the sublime, natural beauty of the universe and the heterogeneity – the ‘infinite variety’ [*variété infinie*] – of human cultural forms (Fontenelle 1973: 42).

But the obverse of this spectacle is a persistent apprehension: that left to itself knowledge would be inadequate. ‘Shut up in colleges and cells’, says Hume in ‘Of Essay Writing’, learning loses from being detached from the ‘conversable world’. As a result *belles lettres* have become ‘totally barbarous’, and philosophy ‘a moping recluse method of study’ (Hume 1971: 569). The remedy for this cultural dysfunction relies on already existing models of information-flows derived from diplomacy and commerce. Hume advocates ‘a *league* between the learned and conversible worlds’ for their ‘*mutual* advantage’ and for resisting their ‘*common* enemies, [...] the enemies of reason and beauty, people of dull heads and cold hearts’. He seeks ‘a good *correspondence*’ between the ‘dominions of learning and those of conversation’ so that they complement each other: ‘the materials of this commerce [...] chiefly furnished by conversation and common life: the manufacturing of them alone belonging to learning’ (Hume 1971: 569–70 (my italics)).

Hume’s essay about writing essays demonstrates a ‘representative of the mind’ [*Représentant des Geistes*], fulfilling an obligation inherent in his knowledge-function: the promotion of sociability ‘by mutual exchange of commodities and services’ as advocated by Cicero in *De Officiis* [*On Duties*] (Cicero 1975: 182–3). It re-evaluates prevailing epistemological values. Hume demonstrates that he enjoys an administrative overview of social cognitive circumstances, of the world of symbolic forms. He, therefore, also occupies a significant, mediating nodal point in the information-systems that facilitate the social dissemination of knowledge. He sees himself as ‘an *ambassador* from the dominion of learning to those of conversation’. He ‘gives intelligence to the learned of whatever passes in company’ and ‘imports into company whatever commodities [he finds] in [his] native country proper for their use and entertainment’ (Hume 1971: 570 (my italics)). Thus the transvaluation of values occurs. Values from different information-systems are being exchanged to their mutual benefit. His elevated position enables the philosopher – like the politician, the doctor, the historian, the lawyer – to be persuasive, to issue his ‘commands’ [*mots d’ordre*] (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 100). The essay on essay writing is itself one such imperative command. It discloses a further perspective. In their elevated situation, the representatives of mind, the intelligentsia, seem to have an inherent capacity for persuasion that affirms its authority. In fact both this elevated situation and its persuasive capacity would be redundant without this information-content and its commerce.

Further, Hume’s essay does more than protect knowledge itself irrespective of its specialized technical nature (as Descartes urged in *Règles pour la direction de l’esprit* [*Rules for the Orientation of the Mind*] (1627–1628)). Rather, if society is a learning environment, he is concerned that it maintains this capacity. Here he inevitably comes into contact with the very antithesis of philosophy, – unenlightened, opinionated chatter (what Hegel calls *Meinen*, and Heidegger *Gerede*).

His advocacy of conversation and good company as means of disseminating knowledge is meant to prevent ‘our whole discourse being a continued series of gossiping stories and idle remarks’ (Hume 1971: 569). Precisely this care for language, born of a love of language, confirms the intellectual’s cognitive stance.

(f.) For the Enlightenment (for Modernity as a whole) knowledge is indispensable. It maintains the systems, material and symbolic, that sustain human life. It, therefore, needs constant development and improvement. But precisely this self-revision in the social knowledge-function produces heterogeneity. Its different forms and practices progress differently: the most advanced technology propagates the most regressive ideology. The sheer diversity of views is testimony to a fundamental freedom of speech and thought, yet the mass proliferation of self-expression is justifiably ephemeralized. The main organs of heterogeneous public information belong to a few dominant financial and ideological interests. So the dissemination of modern Enlightenment values is hampered not just by regressive conservative or affirmative traditional values but also by the heterogeneity of values, vitiating the value of ‘value’ itself, and to which the Enlightenment like any other value-system inevitably contributes. Modernity turns out to be the Enlightenment gone to seed. Hardly a learning environment, society is nothing but a scene of mass deception and public gullibility, a forum for public self-indoctrination, the deposition of the representatives of mind, the revolt of the masses.

4. The transvaluation of knowledge values: Knowledge as fatality

(a.) In *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739/1740] Hume reflects on his invidious situation as a philosopher. The transvaluation of philosophical values his work represents has left him, as he says, ‘affrighted and confounded with that forelorn solitude, in which I am plac’d in my philosophy’. Socially speaking, it has ostracized him: ‘I [...] fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell’d all human commerce, and left utterly abandon’d and disconsolate’ (Hume 1969: 311–12). He recognizes that advocating transvaluation poses its own, severe risks. Yet, precisely for the philosopher, the quest for intellectual adequacy is an ineluctable obligation. It imposes itself as fate. Inevitably, if he declares his ‘disapprobation’ of metaphysics, rationalism, natural theology, and established religion itself, thinkers affirming them must in turn ‘express a hatred’ of his work and his person. In these circumstances, fatal because not of his choosing, he feels isolated and existentially vulnerable, as his recourse to first-person narrative underlines. ‘When I look abroad’, he says, ‘I foresee on every side, dispute contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance’. His intractable, paradoxical position threatens to undermine his world-view: ‘All the world conspires to oppose and contradict me’, he complains, ‘tho’ such is my weakness, that I feel all

my opinions loosen and fall of themselves, when unsupported by the approbation of others'. He finds himself confronted with a deep misgiving absolutely essential for testing the validity of the transvaluation he would provoke: 'Can I be sure', he says, 'that in leaving all establish'd opinions I am following truth; and', he continues, 'by what criterion shall I distinguish her, even if fortune shou'd at last guide me on her footsteps?' To allude to Kant's terminology, Hume is almost succumbing to 'disorientation' in his thinking: 'Every step I take is with hesitation, and every new reflection makes me dread and error and absurdity in my reasoning' (Hume 1969: 312).

Hume's 'philosophical melancholy and delirium' lead him to survey a series of epistemological positions involving experience and habit; memory, the senses, and the understanding; and the imagination and reason, particularly in its 'refin'd or elaborate' form as found in science and metaphysics (Hume 1969: 316). His transvaluation is a search for a new sense of mental adequacy designed to test the reliability of hitherto accepted epistemological certainties, a new principle of (questionably) sufficient reason. But he finds only inconsistency, contradiction: 'the deficiency in our ideas' and the 'illusions' of comprehension (Hume 1969: 313, 314, 316). Further this question of adequacy is construed in terms of a glaring imbalance between the cognitive intensity of the effort and the mental paucity of the result. Repeatedly Hume abides by his transvaluation. It shows that the value of epistemological rectitude based on already recognized 'certainties' is so problematic as to be worthless. The question of his own existential adequacy (illustrated above) converges with the question of the epistemological value of personal effort, as when he remarks: 'When we trace up the human understanding to its first principles, we find it to lead us into such sentiments, as seem to turn into ridicule all our past pains and industry, and to discourage us from future enquiries' (Hume 1969: 313). Further (e.g.) he laments that 'the *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reasoning [i.e. in metaphysics] has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another.' He is mentally disorientated, with a sense of personal fatality exclaiming: 'Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return?' (Hume 1969: 316).

Hume emerges from this dilemma by redefining adequacy, by re-evaluating the relationship between mind and world. Here he re-assesses both the situation of philosophy and his own cognitive predicament. He scales the scope of knowledge down from the lofty abstractions of metaphysics to the ethos of ordinary life. In so doing, he 'yields to the current of nature'. He finds himself 'absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life'; a 'natural propensity' reduces him to his 'indolent belief in the general maxims of the world'. But this self-reorientation effected by transvaluation also means 'submitting to [his] senses and understanding', which shows 'most perfectly' his 'sceptical disposition and principles'. But this does not justify him 'secluding [himself] from the commerce

and society of men’ or ‘torturing [his] brain with subtilities and sophistries’ when he ‘cannot satisfy [himself] concerning the reasonableness of so painful an application’, especially since it cannot serve ‘either for the service of mankind, or for [his] own private interest’. Hume here repudiates philosophy as an introverted, ascetic undertaking. What banishes his melancholy is something convivial, a ‘serious good-humour’d disposition’, rather than ‘the force of reason and conviction’. Reason is fruitless unless it is ‘lively, and mixes itself with some [natural or social] propensity’ (Hume 1969: 316, 317).

(b.) For Hume, therefore, it is axiomatic: ‘In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism’. Matching the dissenting reservation typical of the intellectual’s cognitive stance, scepticism becomes the basis of a transvalued adequacy between mind and world, thought and reality, a minimal sufficiency of reason for the world existing as it is. Scepticism also informs his ‘natural inclination’, his curiosity, that leads him to explore all the various aspects of human existence: morality, government, taste, ‘truth and falsehood, reason and folly’, – that also (as Descartes recommended) permits him to assume responsibility for the state of knowledge, particularly for the ‘learned world’ and its ‘deplorable ignorance in all these particulars’, the side-effect of its predilection for esoteric metaphysical speculations. And the value of this new transvaluation, of its adequacy – the mental rectitude it represents – defines what Hume confirms as the ‘origin of [his] philosophy’: ‘an ambition to arise in [him] of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by [his] inventions and discoveries’, – the essential principle of the Enlightenment and his personal commitment to it (Hume 1969: 317–18).

Enacting thus the transvaluation of values, the Enlightenment reveals both the fate of knowledge and the fatality knowledge becomes. In so doing it acknowledges a foundational myth of Western culture, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden for having sustained themselves with fruit from the tree of knowledge, for thereby becoming self-conscious, for inevitably – fatally – condemning themselves and their descendants to an existence of toil and suffering.

That is the thesis so far. The terms ‘fate’ and ‘transvaluation’ might seem to imply what historians call ‘change over time’, as though time enabled history to effect change by construing itself as a productive ‘stream’ or ‘force’ or ‘course’, a self-conception blending change and continuity together. The thesis argued here, however, rejects any historically pre-empted representation of the Enlightenment. It stresses rather that ‘what “changes” and what “stays the same” are both of them descriptive propositions, but of different order’ (Bateson 2002: 58). History is, therefore, illusory: it deliberately confuses this difference. Underpinning the thesis here focussed on ‘fate’ and ‘transvaluation’ is rather Burckhardt’s conviction that ‘the mind has variability, but not transience’ [*der Geist hat Wandelbarkeit, aber nicht Vergänglichkeit*] (Burckhardt 1969: 7). The mind is a cultural constant: its metamorphic capability depends on this basic constancy, hence on duration [*durée*] (a property of nature), rather than

on chronology (the chronometrical calibrations culture-management supplies). Mind testifies to itself, to its presence, through its phenomenal variability.

The transvaluation of values and the fate of knowledge illuminate each other. They thereby testify to the variability of the mind. ‘Transvaluation’ is here used intentionally. ‘Paradigm-shift’ might also have served, but it implies a conceptual re-orientation; so too ‘thought-style’, since it suggests different ways of encoding descriptions of available data. Certainly they inform the ethos of ‘transvaluation’, but ‘transvaluation’ implies something more. It indicates an existential investment in conceptual re-orientations and descriptive encodings. Its ‘worth’ is not limited to making sense of scientific data and testing scientific methodologies. Rather it comes from its capacity to clarify and direct existential choices and to reconceptualize the circumstances they are made in. Hence, for its reliability it is assayed pragmatically, in terms of the behaviour it motivates, the objectives it achieves.

The Enlightenment is one example of transvaluation, – one example of the variability of the mind. Broadly speaking, it opposed absolutism with democracy, superstition with empiricism, orthodox worship with religious toleration, a theistic with an anthropocentric world-view, traditional habit with scientific innovation. This may well seem progressive. But the variability of the mind is not arrested by the variable phenomena it produces. If the mind is a cultural constant, its constancy is expressed through its phenomenal variability. The various transvaluations it reveals prove its immutable persistence.

(c.) Further, this constant variability – e.g. the variability exemplified by the Enlightenment both in its own transvaluation of values and in the re-evaluations it itself still undergoes – discloses the fate of knowledge. Transvaluation *is* the fate of knowledge. An idea can be conceptually justified and, therefore, persist, even though its existential or cultural validation evaporates.

In *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [*Beyond Good and Evil*] (1886) Nietzsche rejects conventionally accepted truth for ‘false truth’ he validates for being vital, ‘promoting and preserving life, dangerously offering resistance to the usual feelings for values’. His rejection enacts a transvaluation of values. It reveals accepted truth, hitherto existentially indispensable, as normally predicated on ‘logical fictions, mapping reality by means of a purely invented world of what is unconditional, of the self-same [*Sich-selbst-Gleichen*], as a perpetual falsification of the world by means of numbers’ (Nietzsche 1988b: 18, §4). For Huxley in ‘Evolution and Ethics’ (1893) the anthropological pre-occupation of the Enlightenment (e.g. Pope’s assertion that the ‘proper study of Mankind is Man’) becomes a cosmologically inflated anthropic conceit. For the sake of society’s ethical progress it apparently permits ‘not [...] imitating the cosmic process, still less [...] running away from it, but [...] combating it’. ‘Audacious though it seems’, Huxley concedes, ‘to pit the microcosm against the macrocosm and to set man to subdue nature to his higher ends’, he believes that ‘the great intellectual difference between the ancient times [...] and our day, lies in the solid foundation we have acquired for the hope that such an enterprise may meet with a certain measure of success’ (Huxley 1911: 83). Horkheimer

and Adorno in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [*Dialectics of Enlightenment*] (1947) show how the Enlightenment's commitment to human self-emancipation in fact produced a culture of totalitarian, capitalist, and technocratic domination, already recognizable in Carlyle's culture of Mechanism. The scientific power that subdued nature automatically subdues the human individual now reduced to uttering the ever-same, Cartesian 'I think' (cf. Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 27).

Historicized thinking would automatically construe these instances as 'landmarks' in the 'later history' of the Enlightenment. In doing so, it would also construe them as transient attitudes symbiotic with their historical 'context' – that is: with whatever circumstances external to them, but synchronous with them, happened to prevail. For that reason historicized thinking can be discounted for being a falsification. It digresses from the crucial issue: the transvaluation of cognitive values, a characteristic of ideas produced by the mind through its phenomenal variability and articulated according to its own (internal) temporal structure. The fluctuating evaluations of the Enlightenment in Nietzsche, Huxley, and Horkheimer and Adorno are integral to the concept. As integral values and expressed through their variability (as mental constructs), they inevitably display themselves, not in terms of historical chronology, but in their own good time, in the time it takes them to gain some knowledge of themselves, the successive phases of their own *durée*.

Comprehensive knowledge is not achievable: it lacks a basic stability. Ideas are constantly subject to specialized technical revision, their value re-estimated by scholastic connoisseurship. Also the existential commitment to cognitive stances in themselves variable has inevitably a propensity to fluctuate. Moreover, it is impossible to tell whether or not an idea is given all the opportunities it requires to realize its cognitive potential. Having perhaps lost relevance, been abandoned by the latest disciplinary trends, ideas can hibernate until to an untimely, unprepossessed reader the foxed pages of a distressed volume prove intellectually illuminating. In any case, the potential worth of an idea expresses itself in its own good time. In doing so, it leaves the impression that the currently available knowledge is inadequate, by definition insufficient, since there is always, at some time (but in its own time, according to its own, inherent time-scheme) more to come, more to pursue.

(d.) The variability of the mind; fluctuating existential commitments to its phenomenal, mental creations; their worth articulated according to their own, integral time-structure; an apprehension of personal cognitive inadequacy induced by whatever turns the transvaluation of values takes: these circumstances cannot help generating concern for the fate of knowledge. In the world of everyday experience [*Lebenswelt*] they indicate a certain cognitive inadequacy. Existentially speaking, experience is destined always to be trying to catch up with the variable developments the mind produces. Once they can be described and their implications and ramifications traced, that seems to indicate that experience has finally caught up with them. Actually, however, it

signifies that the description, the crucial act of cognizance, has come too late, always coming afterwards, as an epilogue. That is to say, it leaves the immediate present unaccountable, obscure. It, therefore, has little option but to have recourse to past precedent, to historicize itself either by the pursuit of the ever-latest thing, the next best thing to the immediate present, or by its actually illusory, pre-emptive conceptualization.

The transvaluation of values thus discloses the fate of knowledge, the fatality that is knowledge. But 'fate' here has a specific meaning. It identifies a critical issue: what happens when cognitive procedures and, derived from them, the knowledge affirming the conventional (academic) way of thinking, subordinating itself to disciplinary trends, indulging itself in its conceptual complacency, or supporting scholastic connoisseurship, encounters knowledge – Enlightenment knowledge – intended to change the way people think, to inspire them to think better? This cognitive situation itself is a situation of rupture, of the clash between heterogeneous values, between an entropic intellectual ethos incapable of self-regeneration and a philosophical culture that pursues the transvaluation of all values. It also implies establishment of bureaucratic-administrative control. Leave aside the terrifying, sinister figures in Greek mythology manipulating the threads of life: Clotho spinning the thread of an individual's life; Lachesis determining its length; and Atropos terminating it, cutting it with her shears. Their function has long since been assumed by the technical experts, dogmatic ideologists who tailor the world of experience and cut its social fabric according to their own, inexorable designs.

Knowledge as fate, therefore, takes several forms (thus amplifying its manifestation in *Genesis*):

α. Fate supplies a retrospective inevitability to an existentially menacing crisis, otherwise unanticipated, beyond the horizon of consciousness, beyond the scope of what is known. This inevitability is meant to explain its occurrence by virtue of it being inevitable, as though pure inevitability had an inherent explanatory function. What inevitability does do: it supplies the incident with a precedent time-structure that is not historical, but circumstantial, circumstances in their own good time making themselves known by eventually producing a crisis hitherto dormant in the unconscious.

β. Conversely, fate can be known. Oedipus's father, Laius, knew what fate Apollo had preordained for him. To avoid it, he abandoned his infant son, Oedipus, to the elements to die. He did not know that, by definition, fate cannot be avoided. He did not conceive of his son being rescued. Neither did Oedipus know that in murdering a king (who turned out to be Laius) and marrying his queen (who turned out to be his mother, Jocasta) he was already enacting his family's fate, what was pre-determined for it. Sophocles's tragedy, amongst other things, is a drama of the protagonist becoming knowledgeable, of self-discovery as revelation. Oedipus discovers the vast gulf between what he thinks he has properly done and what his self-incriminating transgressions actually are: 'I think I've just called down a dreadful curse/upon myself – I simply did not know', he exclaims (Sophocles 1984: 203; ll.821–2). Knowledge, the knowledge Laius had

of his own fate, the knowledge motivating his attempt to avoid it, becomes an instrument of fate itself. In this fundamental case, knowledge is fatal.

γ. In tragedy the protagonist's lack of knowledge, specifically the restricted scope of consciousness, brings about his or her downfall. As Aristotle observes, the truly tragic person 'is someone not pre-eminent in virtue and justice, and one who falls into adversity [...] through some kind of error' (Aristotle 1999: 71). Here ethical knowledge and the action it permits are crucial. As the involvement of 'virtue' and 'justice' implies, tragedy and fatality are constitutive of the world. They demonstrate that in this world values are not just indispensable but also inevitably conflicted, the conflict animated by its own inherent fatality (cf. Scheler 1955b: 157). A specific ethical – hence value-based – attitude is a reading (or rather misreading) of its circumstances in the world. The tragic genre, therefore, discloses, and depends on, an anthropic inadequacy due to a lack of knowledge: an ethical (axiological) inadequacy, the result of a flawed personality bereft of self-knowledge, but also a cognitive inadequacy, a chronic failure in self-orientation in the world, a world of values. So, in any given tragic circumstances arising from a conflict of values, 'fate' designates the disclosure in its own good time of the errors that reveal this inadequacy, the catastrophe it culminates in.

δ. By contrast, a surfeit of knowledge may have fatal ramifications, particularly when personal experience is superseded by impersonal information. The amplification of technically specialized knowledge (as a futile compensation for unachievable comprehension) works against its intended practical relevance. The mind has a limited capacity for processing complexity. The exponential production of information, reflected in the exponential proliferation of specialized publications, means 'that it becomes easier to rediscover a fact rather than to find out whether or not somebody else has already discovered and described it' (cf. Waddington 1977: 33). It means, further, 'that it only takes a few years for a considerable fraction [e.g. 87.5%] of most people's store of knowledge [acquired at school or university] to get out of date' (cf. Waddington 1977: 34, 35). This fatal trend produces not just the heterogeneity of values and cognitive attitudes, nor even the social synchronization of values and attitudes that are essentially asynchronous, moving through various stages of obsolescence, but also the now friable basis of social thought and action.

(e.) This synchronization of asynchronous realities [*die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*] is a defining characteristic of Modernity (cf. Bloch 1977: 116ff., 122ff.). In these circumstances the 'general intellect' offers no guidance. In the form of constant occupational 're-training' or 'innovation', it too is driven by heterogeneous asynchronicity: the latest thing usurping the way things had got to be. In the end, the very surfeit of knowledge proves fatal: it comes down to moving blindly through a world dazzling with informed intelligence. This fatal cognitive situation generates a culture of apprehension, a pervasive ethos of risk and shame. The estrangement between engrained experience and arrogant expertise that overrules it produces a 'risk society' predicated – reassuringly

– on conceivable, calculable risks, but – alarmingly – defenceless against unanticipated, incalculable incidents (e.g. as when a tsunami crashes into a nuclear power-station, when – in Huxley’s terms – the ‘macrocosm’ fatally damages the ‘microcosm’).

Knowledge, then, proves fatal. It has the capacity to be fatal – be it because it is desperately lacking, be it because its surfeit is technically unmanageable, be it through the ‘errors’ attendant on this lack or surfeit, be it ultimately because it exposes a self-determinism in ideas produced by the variability of the mind as a cultural constant that articulates itself in its own good time and is for that very reason hardly discernible in history’s tattered fabric. As it approaches, knowledge as fate is invisible.

The transvaluation of values attempts to overcome this fatality by proposing an adequate relationship between mind and world, between ideas and action. The self-determinism of ideas in their own good time [*durée*] and historical ‘processes’ as administrative instruments of historicization (cultural chronometry) are essentially incompatible. Inevitably, though, they coincide in the world: the phenomenon called ‘the world’ is constituted by their coincidence. This convergence produces a cultural landscape of heterogeneous and asynchronous concepts and values, a chaotic scene identified as Modernity.

5. Knowledge: Its cognitive adequacy; its sufficient reason

(a.) Kant’s essay, ‘Beantwortung der Frage: was ist Aufklärung?’ [‘An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?’] (1784) as much reflects on the fate of the Enlightenment value-system in the years preceding its publication as it re-defines it. It assesses what it has made of itself in its own good time according to its own intention. Kant would redeem human existence from mental inadequacy, hence from its own fatality, from its congenital propensity for tragic error. Achieving this means initially addressing an attitude of resignation in the public. Obeying the officials of state and church, accepting being told that their business eludes popular comprehension, does seem to make personal life easier. For Kant, though, such a tame, domesticated life is no life. It simply perpetuates its own cognitive inadequacy. Worse, it also denies what the author in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [*The Critique of Pure Reason*] (1781/1787) had already shown. The mind could guide the individual adequately both cognitively and ethically. He or she did not need telling by the authorities political and spiritual what to think and how to act: the individual could do that for him- or herself if only he or she would ‘dare to know’. Supporting the individual’s autonomy would be the public sphere, a forum of books, journals, academies, a veritable republic of letters. Here too, as with Fontenelle and Hume, society would offer a self-enlightening, learning environment, a forum for the elaboration of new values.

And then the argument shifts. It moves from the inadequacy of the public mind seeking to establish its autonomy, a cognitive stance that adequately grasps its social and political circumstances. It moves towards the religious and political institutions that frame existence with an authority resting unbeknown to

them on their own cognitive and ethical inadequacy. *Kant's essay now proposes that foundational social institutions, the church and the state, do not act on the best available knowledge.* Their capacity for encouraging a society of autonomous individuals is, therefore, in current circumstances inadequate. The church resists change: it is not in its interest, not a value it recognizes; its doctrinal dogmatism is supposed to be valid indefinitely. Consequently it pre-empt the future, thereby blocking both the individual's and society's scope for intellectual and moral self-education, for its Enlightenment. In so predetermining future social conditions, religious doctrine perpetrates a 'crime against human nature' [*ein Verbrechen wider die menschliche Natur*] (Kant 1982b: 58). The state's situation is, though, different. It is a human contrivance, governance a human task, even if the monarch rules by divine right. That the monarch might promote the Enlightenment of state and civil society seems feasible. If he did so, he would see that in the matter of legislation there would be no danger [*es ohne Gefahr sei*] in consulting an informed and critical public (Kant 1982b: 60). Kant recognizes, however, that he lives in an age of Enlightenment, not in an enlightened age: a distinction symptomatic of the as yet undeveloped critical capacity of the public and the narrow self-interest of church and state. Their enlightened convergence – hence the transvaluation of values Kant is proposing – he projects onto the future. He is aware that, if society, church, and state can adequately work together in the human interest, it will happen in their own good time, not to the timetable proposed by history's self-serving chronometry.

(b.) The problem of cognitive inadequacy is at the core of *existential inadequacy*. It arises from the concept of mental adequacy. Adequacy establishes the mind's knowledge of the world.⁵ 'Adequacy', deriving from the Latin *adaequare*, implies equivalence; equivalence implies 'equal value'. So adequacy requires the means to be sufficient for achieving the projected ends and the ends themselves worth the means employed to achieve them (as, e.g., in Hume's circumstances). The very definition of adequacy is formulated in terms of equal values. Inadequacy, therefore, implies an imbalance between these values, between mental effort and cognitive intention or achievement. It also implies that this adequacy, ideal as a thought, essentially theoretical, is by definition unattainable practically. Its symptoms appear as 'flawed performances', incidents of *parapraxis*, what Freud calls *Fehlleistungen*. Consequently, circumstances where cognitive intentions and values are unequal (i.e. inadequate) demand a transvaluation of values, a realignment of mind and world.

α. Transvaluation is, therefore, marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, any particular transvaluation can be re-evaluated for the purpose of coming as close as possible to adequacy; on the other, precisely because transvaluation is transitional, it can neither match mind and world adequately nor, therefore, replicate the cognitive equilibrium that supports comprehension. At the same time, adequacy is itself no guarantee of cognitive rectitude, even if its self-expression in tautology implies equivalence. It fails not because the mental effort to achieve it might be inadequate so that both effort and aim need

re-assessing, but because the cognitive stability it demands is itself flawed, so that ongoing transvaluations of values have to be the sole basis of knowledge. Adequacy persists on the brink of inadequacy.

β. The ontological security apparently guaranteed by cognitive adequacy explains the significance of the transvaluation of values. Whenever adequacy fails, it alone remains to establish a new adequacy, and with it new certainties, new values, along with the security they afford. In culture, the presence of transvaluation can, therefore, be symptomatic of inadequacy, the dislocation of mind and world, and of an attempt to re-align them. Conversely (and more importantly), transvaluation – especially if fuelled by resentment – can be introduced into culture to rupture intentionally the prevailing stability, to dislocate deliberately any adequate connection between mind and world, to shatter the academic disciplinary orthodoxies that vindicate their coincidence. This way it generates a new cognitive situation with its own theoretical and practical underpinning, be it thereby affording, be it thereby withholding, its own ontological security.

γ. Adequacy – as equivalence – also signifies exchange. It derives from the market-places of Antiquity, from the commercial practice of exchanging commodities for money. Before the commercial transaction occurs value-equivalents need to be settled. In its simplest form reason here manifests itself as reckoning equivalences. But it does not just reduce disparate values to abstract quantities. Nor is it an expression of Postmodernist relativism, whereby any value could be the equivalent of any other. Rather, equivalence is a flexible instrument of cultural control. The adequacy producing it is no rigid template, no conceptual norm. The transvaluations it depends on coordinate the most heterogeneous values. They are indispensable for the remorseless, progressive dynamic of the modern world, the world we live in, the world of the latest things, the world in which the Enlightenment has ‘bolted’, gone to seed.

δ. Adequacy re-evaluates not only the cognitive effort in the light of the cognitive intention, but also the cognitive intention in the light of the cognitive effort it demands. The principle of equivalence inherent in it legitimates this transvaluation of the concept of inadequacy itself. One persistent problem for the Enlightenment remains the vast discrepancy between the beauty of the natural world and the ugliness and the disorder of its human extension. The anatomy of the least insect would reveal evidence of intelligent design; the anatomy of a structure such as society would expose its labyrinthine confusion.

The contrast between the natural and the human state made transvaluation inevitable, a new ratio of adequacy indispensable, the quest for a rational pattern in human reality feasible. But the anthropic transvaluation of values – demonstrated (e.g.) by Pope’s *Essay on Man* – does apparently offer a more adequate conception of human self-knowledge. The metaphysical and the existential need not be adequately aligned. However, the existential need can also produce its own world: e.g. a system of laws governing human societies; history as the constantly unfolding identity of a nation, a culture, or a society.

For Montesquieu, ‘law, in general, is human reason in so far as it governs all the peoples on the Earth; and the civil and political laws of each nation must be only particular cases where this human reason is applicable’ (Montesquieu 1951: 237). For Vico there is little point in philosophers ‘[bending] all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows’, if they thereby ‘neglect the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could come to know’ (ibid.). History is the perfect tautological expression of intellectual adequacy, ‘the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question’, the ideal convergence of mind and world (Vico 1984: 96; §331; 1959: 382; I, iii).

Enlightenment thinking thus proves its adequacy by means of constant transvaluation. Kant’s re-evaluation of the metaphysical jurisdiction of the human cognitive capacity (in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) enables him (in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790)) to define the human creation of a world of culture as Nature’s ultimate purpose. In the form of civil society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] it endows Nature with the order and unanimity it would otherwise be unable to achieve for itself (Kant 1968: 300–2; §83). Thus the concept of cognitive adequacy proves ideologically invincible. As Huxley remarks in ‘Evolution and Ethics’ (1893), the successful attempt to ‘build up an artificial world within the cosmos’ derives from ‘the organized and highly developed sciences and arts of the present day [that] have endowed man with a command over the course of non-human nature greater than that once attributed to magicians’ (Huxley 1911: 83–4). However, in the light of recent environmental disasters, of the ongoing corruption of nature on a planetary scale, this commanding, constructive attempt cannot conceal its redundancy. It is oblivious to its own cognitive situation, to its surely unintended consequence: the negation of its own mental ecology, the confession of its inadequacy.

8. Finally, therefore, the requisite adequacy between thing and intellect as a criterion of truth sounds hollow. Aquinas may well cite Aristotle asserting in cognition, in thought itself, a capacity to define reality, ‘to say what is is, and what is not is not’ (Aquinas 1998: 167; Aristotle 1996b: 200–1 (1011b25)). As ‘primary to tautology’, ‘the act of exact and immediate repetition or reiteration’ may well affirm the very principle of an adequate relationship between mind and world (Steiner 1997: 353). But what *is*, exactly? Does saying what is, say only what is already known? Implied here is the idea that the mind is not just a mirror of the world with thought, via the copula ‘is’, producing its exact image. Rather, as Benda argues in *Du style d’idées* [*On the Style of Ideas*] (1948), thought also expresses the ‘imperialism of the mind’: its penetration into the nature of its objects implies the idea of conquest. Thus thinking supplements the world, increases its weight, – *pensée* (thought) being derived from the Latin *pensum* (weight) (Benda 1948: 30–1). Hence, tautology disqualifies itself from being a form of thought, when it just reiterates its object, when its claim to truth is just a re-description of the same reality, when as a definition – and unless it produces a cognitive reconception or scientific re-orientation – it replaces an object’s disparate

properties (e.g. ‘this figure has three sides’) with a single, unique fact (e.g. ‘it is a triangle’) identifying what it is (Benda 1948: 32–5).

(c.) Kant’s injunction, then, that one should ‘dare to know’ is not self-evident. The adequacy of mind and world it projects, the transvaluation of values that would constantly maintain it, is dynamic despite the principles of equivalence or identity inherent in them promising stability (i.e. $A=A$). Further, the transvaluation of all values as symptomatic of an inadequate connection between mind and world sabotages the cognitive capacity of the mind and the ontological security it guaranteed. The apprehension of inadequacy thus invalidates the ‘mental rectitude’ adequacy vouchsafes. For the Enlightenment specifically this predicament shows its anthropic transvaluation as illusory. Suppose the proper study of Mankind were ‘Man’ (as the Enlightenment did), but ‘Man’ were not equal to the task (as the Enlightenment feared), – but suppose ‘Man’ could create through the mind a world ‘Man’ could not comprehend (as Modernity realized), a world exceeding the comprehensive capacity of the human mind (as Modernity demonstrates)?

(d.) However, the question of the mind being connected adequately with the world around it rests on a further basic, logical premise, enunciated in Classical philosophy, endorsed by the Enlightenment, and refunctioned by idealism in its various forms: the principle of sufficient reason. It is (as mentioned earlier) the foundation of human knowledge. It explains what must occur in the understanding [*Verstand*] to reassure the mind that it has adequate knowledge for making sense of the world it perceives. Specifically this principle becomes the basis of the modern, technical age with its increasingly sophisticated technical expertise, with its thoroughgoing calculable coordination of its constituent elements, which thereby is meant to ensure its capacity for calculation can be secured. However, the incarnation of this Modernity produced by the principle of sufficient reason is ultimately nuclear power as a persistent source of apprehension. Modernity is, above all, the atomic age developed, secured, and supervised by sufficient reason, except that the demands made on it are so great as to be ‘unforeseeable’ [*unabsehbar*] (Heidegger 1997: 202). Hence, a rationally administered world, ostensibly adequately managed, will still elude its self-comprehension.

(e.) Both cognitive stances, adequacy and sufficiency are shadowed by their negation, inadequacy and insufficiency. Ironically a modern, technological age, an explicitly nuclear age, the result of incessant cognitive transvaluations, produces a sense of inadequacy, of insufficiency, both cognitive and existential. Its pathogenic symptom is a feeling of what Günther Anders calls ‘Promethean shame’, a self-incriminating, fatal corruption of the primordial vision of human civilization projected by Aeschylus’s tragedy. Does the Enlightenment, therefore, collapse under the weight of the ideal expectations placed on it? Or is it just self-cancelling? If the ‘world machine’ [*machine du monde*] (Leibniz), a culture of ‘Mechanism’ (Carlyle), or global technocratic exo-skeleton [*Gestell*]

(Heidegger) induce a sense of inadequacy, or insufficiency, let alone a sense of shame, what else can they do but produce more technology, more 'latest' devices, and, therefore, more self-historicization? They could hardly produce less without further confirming their inadequacy. And, as a technology of technologies, history cannot help promoting this inevitable cultural tendency. However, its persistent pursuit of self-sameness, of the same old thing, for the sake of contingent adequacies and sufficiencies loses any overall sense. In striving for more comprehension, knowledge, meant to enlighten, represses any apprehension of inadequacy or insufficiency. Nothing then prevents it from being fatal. That would include the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment gone to seed. A fatal Enlightenment: would that be the 'adequate' explanation of, the 'sufficient reason' for, Modernity? Modernity would consequently signify the failure of intelligibility. Already predicated on redundancy, the principles of identity (i.e. adequacy) and of sufficient reason collapse in on themselves. This situation proves fatal to the Enlightenment as incessant, dynamic self-transvaluation. It cannot help being compromised when the basis [*Grund*] of intelligibility, maintained by culture governed by all those who trade in ideas, falls apart, when it reveals itself as a flawed performance (*parapraxis*) on a global scale.

6. Modernity: Parapraxis; the psychopathology of historicized life

(a.) Introducing his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* [*Discourse on the Origins of Human Inequality*] (1755) Rousseau makes a remarkable observation. Addressing the reader and, through him or her, human beings in general, he says that there is an age at which the individual would like to stop, and that person would, therefore, also seek the age at which he or she would wish the human species would also have stopped. This wish for the capability to regress comes from dissatisfaction with present circumstances for reasons that announce to a wretched posterity even greater dissatisfactions to come. This wish would esteem this person's ancestors, censure his or her contemporaries, and terrify those who would have the misfortune to live thereafter.

Rousseau here introduces a transvaluation of the values prevailing hitherto. He envisages temporal disruption. He envisages a desire for historical time to be dislocated. In this respect he dissociates himself from the Enlightenment's naïve historicism that vindicates its intellectual and ethical aspirations. In wishing (by reference to historical chronometry) that cultural development would have halted and personal existence stopped, Rousseau presents this historicism in its negative form, as a breakdown between existential-personal and socio-economic time-scales. Where he does envisage a naïve, temporal continuity (ancestors → contemporaries → posterity), he senses ever-increasing apprehension. Significant here is the synchronization in the present of asynchronous temporal dimensions. It is symptomatic of the heterogeneity of facts and values evident in the deception, exploitation, conflict, ambitiousness, misery, that, as

Rousseau argues, goes with social and cultural development, with the historically very latest thing, the most modern thing.

(b.) That Modernity can claim to be the outcome of the Enlightenment is a perennial topic in its historicization. Strangely enough though, this claim is never defined. It presumes that the modern world is where everyone now lives. Everywhere present, there is no need to define it. ‘Modern’, therefore, is an important, extremely elastic categorical coordinator (cf. ‘period’, ‘epoch’, ‘age’). It can mean as much or as little as the scholastic connoisseur or the technical historical expert requires. It is, in other words, practically useless. Certainly it characterizes the Enlightenment’s self-conception. But that means little unless the ‘period’-concept itself imports something extra into it. And precisely here – discussing it in historiographical terms – it loses focus. Modernity can refer to the ‘present day’, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; or a historical phase (e.g. between the Renaissance and Postmodernism). It might have begun with the invention of printing in the early fifteenth century, but also with industrialization in the early nineteenth century. It informs the cultural conflict in literary taste and values between traditional norms and topics and contemporary forms and subjects, the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, that lasted from the late seventeenth into the early nineteenth century. In historicist schemes it might signify a post-Antiquity, post-Mediaeval, still transitional stage in humanity’s future intellectual and moral self-realization, or it might coincide with the impending terminal winter of European civilization.

Certainly, the temporal ‘distance’ between the Enlightenment (as it was) and the present-day is habitually assumed to offer a reliable standpoint for surveying it. But what justifies this assumption? The scope of human life is biologically, mentally inadequate for eliciting the sense of history in the historical long-term. The Enlightenment might well be conflated with Modernity: what guarantees that ‘temporal distance’ (e.g. c. 1700–c. 2000) provides adequate sense or sufficient reason? It is an assumption that works only in the discourse of sophisticated historicism, – as in these examples:

α. Because many people now likely to be interested in the Enlightenment live in modern societies, historians can treat it patronizingly, condescendingly. Humanity may be left coping with its ‘legacy’ (e.g. ambiguities over human rights, democracy, etc.), but for that the latest responses are required. That leaves these historians’ verdict on the Enlightenment vacuous: ‘Even in the 18th century the Enlightenment’s significance was believed to transcend its immediate historical circumstances: it held out the prospect of a new, *explicitly modern* understanding of human beings’ place in the world and of radical improvement in the human condition’ (Robertson 2015: 1 (my italics)); or ‘by insisting [...] on its own unfinished nature, the Enlightenment *quite simply* created the *modern world*. It is indeed impossible to imagine any aspect of contemporary life in the West without it’ (Pagden 2013: 345 (my italics)). Here, apparently, Enlightenment – untrammelled by complexity – adequately, automatically accounts for Modernity.

β. A further strategy regards the Enlightenment as a ‘pre- or neo-Modernity’. This leaves it remote enough to be historical, but close enough, adequately modern, to ‘matter’ for the world that is historicizing it. In 1876 Eduard von Hartmann regards Leibniz as ‘the positive apostle of the modern world’ [*der positive Apostel der modernen Welt*] (Hartmann 1876: II, 369); a century later Robert Anchor sees Rousseau ‘as entitled to be called the *first “modern” man*’ (Anchor 1979: 84 (my italics)); later on Peter Gay concludes that ‘Hume, [...], more decisively than many of his brethren in the Enlightenment, stands at the *threshold of modernity* and exhibits its risks and its possibilities’ (Gay 1995: 419 (my italics)); he also asserts ‘that it was the age of the Enlightenment, not the age of the Reformation and Renaissance that may be called the first *truly modern* century’ (Gay 1995: 426 (my italics)); later still Vincenzo Ferrone argues ‘that the late Enlightenment was not at all a part of the historical construct we now identify as *modernity*, using the term to confer a sense of something completed and definitive. It was rather the *laboratory of modernity*’ (Ferrone 2015: xi; 172 (my italics)); most recently, the seventeenth century has been described as ‘the *birth of the modern world*’ (cf. Grayling 2016 (my italics)), and then, as though to cap it all, the Enlightenment is affirmed as ‘now’ (cf. Pinker 2018).

These administrative formulations are deceptive – futile attempts to combine historical remoteness with intellectual immediacy. For what does ‘*truly* modern’ mean? What value does ‘truly’ add to ‘modern’? (That something else could be ‘falsely’ modern?) Terms such as ‘apostle’, ‘first man’, ‘threshold’, ‘laboratory’, ‘birth’ operate by virtue of synecdoche, the figure of speech that permits the inference of the whole from the part, hence the fulfilment from the inception, the total construction from the initial prototype. Relying on these instances of categorical ambivalence, the discourse of sophisticated historicism testifies to its own redundancy. This procedure of attributing significance to chronometry, regulated by categorical coordinators such as ‘periods’ or ‘ages’, does justice neither to the Enlightenment nor to Modernity. In fact, the heterogeneity of the facts and values evinced in them reveals sophisticated historicism as an unconscious product of the self-same Modernity it claims to be evaluating, – particularly if the Enlightenment is ‘now’.

γ. When Modernity is defined historically, the definition is patently inadequate. Peter Gay does offer a definition, – not in either volume of *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* where Modernity is central, but in *The Bridge of Criticism*, imaginary dialogues between Lucian, Erasmus, and Voltaire intended to ‘show the continuing vitality of the Enlightenment and to rescue it from some persistent misreadings’ (Gay 1970: 155). In the dialogue ‘On Modernity’ it comes from Voltaire. ‘To be modern’, he says, ‘is to be cut off from the consolations of religion or metaphysics, to be the child [...] of science’. He adds: ‘[T]here is nothing self-satisfied about our claim to modernity: to be modern is as much a burden as it is an opportunity – in fact, it is the very opportunity that makes it a burden’. He concludes: ‘[T]o be modern is to be compelled to face reality’ (Gay 1970: 10). But this definition is useless, its culminating point, ‘compelled to face reality’, unspecific. Moreover, it is dishonest.

Logically speaking, if ‘Modernity’ defines the Enlightenment, everything ‘Modernity’ implies – not just science, technology, progress, secularism, virtue, human rights, egalitarianism, but also, especially, existential inadequacy, historicizing rupture, asynchronicity, heterogeneity, psychopathological compulsions – comes with it.

This type of definition – this definition-convention – ignores particularly the psychopathogenic symptoms the Enlightenment, this radical transvaluation of cognitive and moral values, induces in modern culture. Characteristically, fatally, this type of definition has frequent recourse to euphonic platitudes embracing everything but signifying nothing, – as when Vincenzo Ferrone asserts ‘eighteenth-century humanism’ and its ‘fundamental issue’: ‘reason’s principal object, which has always been man, his progressively awakening consciousness of his fundamental autonomy and finitude, as well as of his liberty and, at the same time, his responsibility towards himself and towards others’ (Ferrone 2015: 96), or when Anthony Pagden concludes: ‘It was about creating a field of values, political, social, and moral, based upon a detached and scrupulous understanding – as far as the human mind is capable – of what it means to be human’, and adds: ‘And today most educated people, at least in the West, broadly accept the conclusions to which it led. Most generally believe that it is possible to improve, through science and knowledge, the world in which we live’ (Pagden 2013: 343). In fact, these conclusions merely display the sophistical element in sophistical historicism. They may well sound euphonic. But what is offered as direct cultural intervention comes down to merely reinforcing the self-serving value-ideals, beliefs, and practices of professional historians. The claim that the Enlightenment could ‘improve’ the world does not dispel the implication that it proposes only an improved world for capitalism, an ‘improved’ capitalism with ‘improved’ forms of exploitation, since the world is capitalist through and through. In any case, the idealistic, ‘humanistic’ sentiment is no sooner extended than withdrawn, – cancelled by the implication that the minority (along with those in the East) who might not endorse the benefits of knowledge and science (who, in other words, might reject their fatality) are ‘uneducated’. Thus the Enlightenment’s dissident motivation is neutralized.

δ. Given a conceptually hazy Modernity, the historical ‘period’ the Enlightenment – itself a historical ‘period’ – has apparently produced, a further strategy denies any historical affinity between them.

Adopting a stance based on academic disciplinary tradition, Robertson (e.g.) has historians ‘standing up for the Enlightenment’ as a ‘salutary counterweight to the persistent [i.e. particularly modern] criticism of the philosophers’ (Robertson 2015: 126). More radically, Andreas Pečar and Damien Tricoire (e.g.) reject the historiography that ‘locating’ [*verortet*] a ‘rupture in tradition’ [*Traditionsbruch*] in the eighteenth century and making the Enlightenment the ‘foundational epoch’ [*Gründungsepoche*] of Modernity distorts historians’ view of it (Pečar and Tricoire 2015: 14). Their aim, basic to historicization, is to affirm the identity of the Enlightenment. For them it is evident ‘that the modernizing,

future-orientated agenda of the Enlightenment forfeits its supposed Modernity, if it is placed in the context of the time when it emerged and the concepts it formulated are not detached from contemporary debates' [*dass die modernisierende, zukunftsweisende Agenda der Aufklärung ihre vermeintliche Modernität einbüßt, wenn man sie im Kontext ihrer Entstehungszeit verortet und die formulierten Inhalte nicht löst von den zeitgenössischen Debatten*] (Pečar and Tricoire 2015: 181). Here 'context', 'contemporaneity', 'origin' are proposed as in themselves synchronous because they all indicate an identical phase marked by historical chronometry. Nevertheless, with its capacity for self-transvaluation the Enlightenment resists scholastic-administrative classification. Take, e.g. Voltaire's response to Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*. From the standpoint of cultural progress he ridicules what he sees as Rousseau advocating regression to a primitive age. Thus a crucial controversy of the Enlightenment displays nothing if not synchronous asynchronicities and heterogeneous values (whether or not a concept of Modernity is required to identify them).

Moreover, in their historicizing discourse, Pečar and Tricoire display the very Modernity they repudiate. Their scholastic-categorizing practice still depends on the co-existence of different time-dimensions. Understanding the Enlightenment as a historical 'epoch' means discounting the history it subsequently produced. To be properly appreciated Enlightenment history thus dispenses with the history of the Enlightenment. Defining when Enlightenment history must stop, stipulating when the historian's own interest ceases, this replicates Rousseau's temporal dislocation. Here, constructed by categorical coordination the historian sets up, the chronometric phases of history parallel what happens to the Enlightenment in its own 'good' time, driven by its own, unconscious fatality. Further, being historians automatically permits Pečar and Tricoire arbitrarily to re-configure these asynchronous time-dimensions. The world-view of the Enlightenment apparently does not correspond to present-day 'norm-conceptions' [*Normvorstellungen*]. So they propose 'at the same time normalizing [it], putting it a distance as an epoch like any other shaped by its own pre-occupations and not as an age that has produced our present-day world' [*die Aufklärung zugleich zu normalisieren und auf Distanz zu setzen: sie als eine Epoche wahrzunehmen, die wie jede andere [...] geprägt war – nicht als ein Zeitalter, das unsere heutige Welt hervorgebracht hat*] (Pečar and Tricoire 2015: 181). They forget that the point of reading philosophy and literature especially from even the most remote times is precisely to encounter new norms, new forms of thought and behaviour that expand one's world-view. Only cancelling historical-chronometrical measures of distancing makes it possible. By contrast Pečar and Tricoire display something characteristically modern: not just a historical consciousness, but – as their sophisticated chronometric re-configurations reveal – a historicized historical consciousness.

(c.) As these examples suggest, history fails to conceive of the Enlightenment without ambivalence. It masks its own cognitive inadequacy. Kant and Rousseau show, however, that the Enlightenment itself induces ambivalence. Its transvaluations are so radical, so fatal, that they test the credulity even of its

apologists. The Enlightenment by its very character projects both aspiration and dejection, not least dejection provoked by its aspiration. It predisposes its commentators to oscillate between affirmation and reservation, this oscillation a mental constant in its reception. Irrespective of the Enlightenment's 'context', its moral and cognitive pretensions are counterbalanced by misgivings over its structural adequacy. These still weaken its obligating purpose or express frustration with it. It is as if this ambivalence were symptomatic of discontent induced by even the theoretical prospect of a rationally organized, enlightened civilization, an instinctive repudiation of total acculturation.

In a world it organized, the Enlightenment as a concept finds itself at odds with its technocratic materialization. The attempt to reconceive it soon discovers that there is no longer any cognitive situation uninfluenced by Enlightenment thinking or evaluations. No longer are there any 'value-free' positions possibly conducive to impartial evaluations. Value-free judgements themselves derive from enlightened thinking. And if there were any it would be to no avail. Whatever its self-determined agenda, thinking cannot work in the sterile atmosphere of scholarship or the clinical conditions of technical expertise, not least because the world in which people ordinarily live is anything but sterile or clinical. Moreover, the Enlightenment as a form of dissent in the name of humanity is not best served by 'the humanities'. Their ethos of scholastic connoisseurship boosted by technical expertise produces more information than can be assimilated, that becomes, therefore, inevitably, ultimately redundant.⁶ Conversely, it seems plausible that the concentrated studiousness, indispensable for assimilating and evaluating them, is a de-sensitizing distraction from immediate circumstantial realities, hence a concession to indifference towards inhumanity (cf. Steiner 2007: 40–1; 2017: 79–80).

7. Enlightenment and Modernity: Their common conceptual field

(a.) In the end, though, this argument must address its own situation. It focuses on what the Enlightenment does: 'does' here understood as what effect it has, what it implements, how it behaves, the behaviour it might require, the aspirations it proposes. It resorts, therefore, to the conceptual field of Modernity.⁷ It recognizes both the fatal polyvalence of the historical Enlightenment in its own good time, its *durée*, and its submergence in the current heterogeneity of values, the *monde morcelé*. But it also suggests that the Enlightenment's ever actual self-transvaluation counteracts the sophisticated historicism persistently historicizing it.

(b.) As a conceptual field, Modernity can be defined in several ways (and in addition to those already mentioned and those to be discussed later).

Its philosophical scope covers, e.g. both Descartes's *Méditations métaphysiques* [*Metaphysical Meditations*] (1641/1642) with its geometrical, inductive approach to the basis of human knowledge and its reconception in Husserl's *Cartesianische Meditationen. Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie* [*Cartesian*

Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology] (1931) with its reductive analysis of the self-constitution of the transcendental ego.

It recognizes too the way in which the proper study of mankind finds its political counterpoint in inhuman, de-humanizing war and genocide, be it in central Europe laid waste in the Thirty Years War (1648) and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars 1793–1815; be it in the devastation of the self-same self-mutilating Europe three hundred years later in 1914–1945, the self-declaration of European culture as a culture of the death-drive, with the traumatized aftermath still perpetuating itself.

Finally, it induces a characteristic psychopathological ethos. The ‘melancholy and delirium’ felt by Hume in his realization that no one accepts his transvaluation of values, that ‘all the world conspires against [him]’ is matched by Baudelaire’s own melancholy and dejection (as expressed in *Les Fleurs du Mal*) induced by the burden of the past blocking a transvaluation of the present, offered *inter alia* in an essay, a paradigmatic definition of Modernity, about Constantin Guys as a quintessentially modern artist, an artist who does not ‘scorn the present’ (Baudelaire 1976: 694ff.). Underlying the attitude of both Hume and Baudelaire is precisely the relationship to current reality, the affirmation of actuality. Foucault sees this as the premise of Modernity introduced by Kant in his definition of the Enlightenment (Foucault 2001: 1388, 1396). As Foucault argues (following Kant) what motivates Enlightenment is precisely its relationship to actuality. This defines a particular historical situation, but also offers the opportunity both to recognize its limits and to overcome them. The Enlightenment would be not so much a set of ideas and values with a cultural agenda for their fulfilment, but, as Hume’s scepticism also confirms, a formal, strategic imperative for constant self-re-evaluation in relation to actuality and a transvaluation of its values.

(c.) The dialectical connection between the Enlightenment’s historicized distancing and its cultural immediacy (as in Pinker’s *The Enlightenment Now* (2018)) reduces it to an object of historicized contemplation and historicizing evaluation. It automatically places it at a disadvantage, vulnerable to devaluation. Certainly there are its cultural achievements in philosophy, literature, art, music, science, and technology. There are also the ideal ethical values they embody, but, though life-enhancing, almost impossible to fulfil, as the *philosophes* – Louis-Sébastien Mercier, e.g. – realized. Instead, they provoke ambivalence. Cultural practice itself would be dispiritingly susceptible to flawed performances, its idealistic obligation a source of resentment, its resentment the motivation for the transvaluation of its values.

Sophisticated historicization reveals this disadvantage. The historical Enlightenment affirms the cultural and political influence of the intelligentsia. It is a paradigm of committed intellectuality. Its moral idealism still informs those who exercise social knowledge-functions. In particular it feeds the self-belief of those involved in the humanities: the scholastic connoisseur, the academic disciplinarian. It justifies their studying the human sciences; it compels their scholastic performance. It vindicates their claim that, through their

academic work, they are ‘cultivating humanity’. But this idealism lends itself to self-delusion. It induces disappointment, a sense of powerlessness. Through its relentless, sophisticated historicizations Modernity – in order to be modern – must keep historicizing itself, must keep redefining its historical situation. Inevitably, therefore, the historical Enlightenment recedes ever further beyond intellectual reach. Discovering ever more about its past, constantly revealing ever more about the ever-same, automatically prevents Modernity from assessing the actuality of Enlightenment ethical ideals. Instead, it projects them onto an even more remote future destined to be their vanishing-point.

(d.) Further this disappointment is all more acute for being symptomatic of Modernity’s time consciousness, the chronometry of a self-historicizing world. The naïve historicism Enlightenment thinkers produced in their own good time expressed the Enlightenment’s own sense of its *durée*. By contrast the sophisticated historicism of Modernity as a whole sees itself as an expression of an already historicized Enlightenment. Orientated by its own historicized historical consciousness, it sees itself as coming afterwards, as the representation of its aftermath. Its evaluations are meaningful, truthful, only because they are fatally ‘added afterwards’ [*nachgetragen*]. That, however, takes them into Freudian territory. Certainly ‘*nachtragen*’ means ‘to add afterwards’, ‘to add subsequently’. But it can also mean ‘to bear a grudge’. Consequently (in Freud’s terms), ‘*Nachträglichkeit*’ signifies a propensity for bearing a grudge or being resentful, a ‘deferred – and resentful – abreactive attitude’.⁸

Resentment, as Max Scheler following Nietzsche observes, derives from a sense of personal powerlessness [*Ohnmacht*] (Scheler 1955a: 38ff.). The result is paradoxical. The scholastic connoisseur, the academic disciplinarian realize that their historicizing practice makes Enlightenment ideals increasingly elusive. They discover their own intellectual powerlessness. Their ambivalence towards the historical Enlightenment testifies to it. From their historicized perspective, the Enlightenment, otherwise validating their academic vocation, appears, therefore, to repudiate them. No wonder, therefore, that the history of the Enlightenment comes with a fatally deferred ‘abreactive attitude’, with resentment masquerading as critical acumen or erudite authority. No wonder either that it dissociates itself from the actually radical implications of the Enlightenment’s persistent existential and ethical demands.

(e.) In this light consider one of the many introductions to the Enlightenment this essay at the outset dismissed. Take, e.g. *The Enlightenment. A Very Short Introduction*. It already presumes that ‘the Enlightenment was *far removed* from the early 21st century’. Consequently, it continues, ‘at *this distance* [...] we should *not be trying* to reassure ourselves that the Enlightenment still matters’ (Robertson 2015: 129 (my italics)). The Enlightenment as intellectual content is thus already relinquished. Here this reconception casually dismisses Peter Gay’s and Antony Pagden’s sense of historical purpose. This depreciation results from the sophisticated historicization of the Enlightenment, evinced in the

observation that ‘so much human catastrophe lies between it and our world in the 21st century’; that ‘modern democracies and modern autocracies face economic, social, political, and now also environmental challenges inconceivable in the 18th century’; that, as a result, the Enlightenment’s ‘commitment to progress, to human betterment, challenges our comprehension’ (Robertson 2015: 129–30). In seeing the Enlightenment as a historical object, the historian shifts it away from actuality. So what actually remains? Despite his disclaimers, the sophisticated, modern historian dodges its ethical challenge formulated in different ways by Hume, Rousseau, and Carlyle. The historian, therefore, can do nothing other than reduce his historical object to a pretext for self-gratification, articulated as customer-satisfaction criteria. ‘We can’, he says, ‘*enrich our own thinking*, our awareness of the *variety of ways* of understanding human affairs, by *imaginatively reconstructing* the conceptual language of Enlightenment thinkers, *recognizing* the problems they encountered, and *appreciating* the originality of their responses to them’ (Robertson 2015: 129–30 (my italics)). Since ‘it is not the relevance of the past which the intellectual historian seeks’, what actually remains is the exquisite thrill of gratifying comprehension, the *raison d’être* of the scholastic connoisseur, – as in the assertion that ‘[the Enlightenment] continues to be *intensely rewarding* to study and understand it, and to *engage with* its intellectual achievements’ (Robertson 2015: 129–30 (my italics)). Once the intellectual content has been deemed not to matter, ‘engaging with it’ in purely scholastic terms, as an object of study (what else?) ensures it now goes nowhere. It is a curious kind of ‘introduction’ that renders its object ineffective and pointless, that a book about the Enlightenment should prove unenlightening.

Transfixed between its historicized distancing and personal cultural immediacy the Enlightenment offers a clear example of the fatal, pathogenic character of human cultural development, especially if approved by scholastic connoisseurship and academic orthodoxy: the waste of a vital existential and ethical support. An idea is not like a sound that echoes from some point of origin down the centuries becoming ever fainter as it apparently loses impetus, requiring, therefore, ever-increasing resources to amplify its signal, wasting time and effort on an always inadequate investment. Any idea to be worth anything needs its advocates’ personal commitment, especially in contravening the disciplinary injunctions of academic expertise, inevitably disrupting the self-serving complacency of scholastic connoisseurship. Disentangle the Enlightenment from Modernity’s flawed performances and consequent resentments, cut back the desiccated growth that has gone to seed: its intellectual achievements still palpitate with vitality.⁹ They address the reader as a contemporary, as Valéry recognized. They confront fatal liabilities endemic in human existence: the eternal recurrence of the same critical, cognitive, and existential situations, each with its perspective on the menacing totality enfolding it. But more than this: the transvaluation of ideas and values it advocates suggests philosophical pragmatism. It redeems the Enlightenment from being caught in a redundant binary structure as either historically distanced or personally gratifyingly immediate. It enables its advocates at least to act *as if* the world really could be enlightened. This strategy would at least show how

far reality falls short of its indispensable idealism, what fictions in compensation would endorse it.

(f.) The Enlightenment then is not just an object, a set of contents, a certain historical cargo of ideas, receding from view as historical time passes, but also a cultural strategy. Certainly, it has to be an object with its own cultural content to the extent that any value must have some supporting substance. Even so, attending to specific aspects of the content (as in the usual literary-historical ephemerality) risks being a distraction from its strategic, enlightening purpose. To fulfil it, it entails in its own good time further re-evaluations of not just its content but also its formal strategy. To disrupt the perpetual recurrence of the same, its transvaluating strategy resists reactionary or ideological opposition. The Enlightenment enlightens only if it produces always different values. Its transvaluation cannot result in irrationalities, ideologies, all the pathogenic varieties of human species' self-harming. That would not be a transvaluation. That would be a relapse into the same old thing, a relapse into history.

As form and strategy the Enlightenment is the advocate of dissident demands. It opposes the times as they are: the entropic historicized world of Modernity generating its own psychopathology, its determining cultural *malaise*. With its apprehensive vigilance, with the dissident stance that implies, it challenges cognitive orthodoxy, rejects received knowledge conventions, ruffles conceptual complacency, – the cognitive orthodoxy and conventions Modernity with its sophisticated historicizations depends on. And, that is surely the Enlightenment's essential value: – the *need* always to clarify its foundations, the basis of its assertions, where it comes from, what is behind it, where it is leading, whether or not it does anything anymore; – the *recognition* that the normal, acceptable forms of knowledge with their conventional academic validation cover all kinds of disciplinary repressions and obsessions that subvert their credibility and value; – the *resolve* to overcome the ambivalence it induces as both symptomatic of Modernity and its therapeutic transvaluation.

The Enlightenment can hardly be 'far removed'. Quite the opposite. It is there ready whenever it is urgent 'to change the common way of thinking' [*changer la façon commune de penser*], to 'work at thinking well [as] the principle of morality' [*travaillons à bien penser: voilà le principe de la morale*] (cf. Diderot 1994a: 403; Pascal 1963a: 528, §200–147). But, as Pascal and Diderot knew, to realize its potential thinking never occurs for its own sake, let alone for 'self-enrichment'. Rather, it emerges from its own apprehensions, overcoming the limits of its immediate situation. It operates on the front-line of reality discovering in what exists landmarks for its self-orientation, conjecturing its own dream-landscapes. Ultimately it enables the world in its own good time to develop its hitherto unrealized capacities. As a means of discovering something else, something other, the Enlightenment is defined by its uncompromising challenge: to 'think properly' [*reinlich denken*] (Bloch 1979: 982ff., 1011ff.).

Notes

- 1 In the original: ‘Axiologie bedeutet sowohl Wertlehre als Wägungslehre, in so fern ἀξία (Axia) der Wert ist, der sich aus der Wägung (dem Hin- und Herführen oder ἄγειν der Wagschalen) ergibt’ (Hartmann 1908: 31).
- 2 On the specific meaning of illusion or *illusio*, see Davies 2004: 5ff.; 2006: 10–11, 138–40, 252–3; 2010: 4ff., 9ff., 18.
- 3 The social knowledge-function is also analysed in Davies 2006: 126ff., 137ff.; 2016: 55ff.
- 4 A current paradigm of the general intellect is historical knowledge itself (cf. Davies 2006: 132ff.). It may call itself ‘objective’, hence ‘true’, but only because it mirrors a world history has already ‘shaped’. Its relation to its object is tautological, hence absolutely objective. It is purported to be the knowledge needed for understanding how society works. It has also a cultural and commercial value, as identity or nationality and as legacy or heritage. The capitalist production of the latest things ensures the prodigious accumulation of the same old – i.e. now historical – things.
- 5 For further discussion of the principle of adequacy, ‘sameness’, and tautology, see Davies 2016b: 229ff.
- 6 For further discussion of redundancy, see Davies 2010: 35ff., 43ff.
- 7 The term ‘conceptual field’ is defined further in Davies 2016b: 229ff.
- 8 For brief definitions of ‘abreaction’ and ‘deferred action’ [*Nachträglichkeit*; *après coup*], see Laplanche et Pontalis 1990: 1–2, 33–6.
- 9 The argument demonstrates what it asserts: it has recourse not just to scholarly editions, testimonies to the painstaking practices of philology, but also to other, more popular editions collected and read over many years, designed specifically for the everyday world [*Lebenswelt*]. (It is typical of academic discipline to wish to silence that voice.)

1 The Enlightenment and the fate of meaning

1. The quest for conceptual contentment

(a.) Some, of course, have no doubt about what it means. For them it has indubitable significance: ‘The Enlightenment [...] has had a far greater and more lasting impact on the formation of the modern world than any of the intellectual convulsions [i.e. the Renaissance or the Reformation] which preceded it’ (Pagden 2013: vii); ‘by insisting [...] on its own unfinished nature, the Enlightenment quite simply created the modern world. It is impossible to imagine any aspect of contemporary life in the West without it’ (Pagden 2013: 345). This evaluation is an amplification of its object – as if the Enlightenment required amplifying. It resorts to a vocabulary of dramatic violence: e.g. ‘**lasting impact**’, ‘**convulsions**’, ‘**impossible**’. It relies on a historicist projection: e.g. ‘**preceded** it’ → ‘the **modern** world’ → ‘**contemporary** life’.

But such grandiose claims express conceptual contentment. They soon collapse into sober realization. The modern world the Enlightenment – allegedly – created also exhibits a ‘pandemic of social evil’, the ‘evil done by human beings in their official capacity, and in what they believe to be in the public interest’ and ‘social-systemic evil, evil generated systematically by social systems and for which no individual human beings take moral responsibility’ (Allott 2002: 138). Or these grandiose claims suggest that confronting this pandemic invokes nostalgia for the Enlightenment’s humanistic ideals. As though their purpose were now to reveal modern culture as psychopathological and to gauge the depths of the human species’ history-driven self-incrimination. But the historicizing strategy that connects Enlightenment with Modernity masks the tensions between them. Conceptually eliding them preserves the historical ‘process’, the ‘legacy’/‘inheritance’ connection between them. Hence the assertion that the cosmopolitan institutions Kant envisaged are ‘somewhat ramshackle, often ineffective’ so that the realization of the ideal of world-citizenship they support ‘may still be some way off’ (Pagden 2013: 350). The historical connection, dependent on categorical coordinators (such as ‘process’, ‘inheritance’, ‘legacy’, ‘tradition’) supplied by the mental act of comprehension, is in any case doubtful. History is all about infusing heterogeneous data with specific meaning. Further, the historicizing strategy, articulated through historicist sequences

and consequences, also masks what is historically unprecedented in the self-incriminating, modern world, – such as the collapse of time and space through global transport and communications systems; the viral dissemination of information via social media; global warming, environmental disasters, and their political ramifications; global terrorism, asymmetrical warfare, that reproduces remote conflicts in familiar cities; global capitalism that ensures the totalitarian homogenization and manipulation of individual experience. This frantic, ‘dromospheric’ character of the modern world (to use Virilio’s term), functioning faster than the speed of thought, ensures that what is true of the past will no longer be true of the present or the future (Virilio 2009: 84). It also underscores the vast difference between the experiential scope available to the eighteenth century and the scope available now. Consequently, how could anyone know if the ‘modern mind’ would be adequate for understanding its situation in the modern world, let alone its adequacy for understanding the Enlightenment?

(b.) Enlightenment thinking, however, compromised itself through its own self-historicization. It positioned itself between its (past) precursors and its (future) descendants as an indispensable link in the chain-drive of human progress. It constructed an analogy between the growth and maturity of the human species and the growth and maturity of the individual. It asserted history as the means to human self-knowledge since it enabled humanity to realize its own dynamic nature. It could see itself as imminently the culmination of the human species’ intellectual and moral progress. But, aware that the age of Enlightenment was by no means an enlightened age, it could project its self-realization, its political materialization, onto a distant future. In these different and contradictory historicizing schemes history functions as both a cognitive template and a rhetorical figure. In these different ways it here too elides differences between (present) reality and the (inevitably postponed, future) ideal.

Except a difference still remains. This conception of history affirms Enlightenment ideals, motivates the behaviour for realizing them. As Herder argued, developing one’s intellectual and moral qualities to their fullest potential would in the course of time develop ‘humanity’ [*Humanität*] as a universal value. The idea of writing *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [*Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity*] (1784–1791) was itself a defining, pragmatic contribution to that end. Or acting according to one’s self-imposed duty to respect humanity [*Menschheit*] as a universal value each individual as a human being represents would surely, eventually produce for everyone their sense of world-citizenship already latent in the course of history. So Kant’s *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [*Critique of Practical Reason*] (1788), his *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* [*Foundations for a Metaphysics of Morals*] (1785), or his essay ‘Idee zu einer Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Hinsicht’ [‘Idea for a History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose’] (1784) offer an agenda for this end.

However, the Enlightenment’s self-projection onto future history is deceptive. Its ideal values relate to a historicist conception of history with a

definite origin and goal. Further, the historical agent that will realize these values is the autonomous individual, the exemplar of the Enlightenment's anthropocentric stance. These values depend on the future: it takes time to affect change, for history's end to materialize, and only the future offers sufficient scope. Further, this projection – vindicated by its historicist logic, driven by metaphysical and ethical imperatives – in itself affirms the Enlightenment as a programme. For this reason at any subsequent historical moment it nevertheless leaves it looking unfinished, at a loss, as though it never could be finished. Hence, given that history sets precedents, that it takes precedence, historians naturally disregard, if not blatantly invalidate, historical counter-precedents, those already asserted by any formal, teleologically determined historicism in the past. (Thus too they reveal how very vulnerable their own historicist precedents are to being invalidated by historians in the future.) They assimilate its currently unfinished form based on ethical values to a Modernity (defined 'as an open-ended, continuing progression, subject to constant scrutiny and re-evaluation') driven by constantly mutating capitalist-economic objectives (Pagden 2013: 10).

(c.) Making conclusive Enlightenment values the same as those of inconclusive Modernity annuls their practical, motivational force. Now ineffectual cognitively and pragmatically, they become purely theoretical. As objects for contemplation, topics for comprehension, they here too are conducive to conceptual complacency. They become academic, – an exclusive, professional self-indulgence (itself justified by a conventional commercial metaphor, by the banality of cliché): 'If the Enlightenment can now only *cast shadows* over us, it continues to be *intensely rewarding* to study and understand it, and *to engage with* its intellectual achievements' (Robertson 2015: 130 (my emphasis)). Nothing prevents Enlightenment values, once theoretically defused and neutralized, from being re-valued and re-functioned by a typically academic form of cynicism. Academic comprehension legitimizes cognizance of dissident thinking that, particularly in a historically remote form, reduces to something technical or documentary.¹ From the technical or documentary evidence thus acquired comprehension permits generalized invocations of social justice, non-specific, self-evident demands for a better world: e.g. 'most educated people [...] generally believe that it is possible to improve, through knowledge and science, the world in which we live' (Pagden 2013: 343); 'Any workable definition of Enlightenment must focus on betterment in this world [...] to stress especially new principles, concepts, and constitutional arrangements being introduced that are conceived to be transforming society for the better' (Israel 2013: 5). But here, of course, conceptual complacency blocks anything specific about whom this 'better world' would be 'better' for, whether for university professors or for the destitute of the society in which they live.

(d.) The automatic recourse to de-politicized political discourse offers immediate contentment. Academic comprehension and its theoretical conclusions

are either too generalized or too specialized to make anything better. In its thought-style this discourse positions the academic as progressive, as an agent of improvement: of a ‘better understanding’, of a ‘better world’. But how else could the professional academic function represent itself? (Would any pride themselves on making the world worse than it is? The absurdity of the negative reveals the treachery of the positive.) Still, what the academic function actually says leaves the present world undisturbed, conserved. It is content with what remains the same: ‘Enlightenment is [...] never outdated because never completed. How could it be when there will always be new problems to face, the old unenlightened forces of interest and power to oppose, and a new generation that has to tackle them, for whom as we grow older may be part of the problem?’ (Reed 2015: 219–20). From the academic position no further development is possible. It leads to a dead end. Once the Enlightenment is deemed unfinishable, then with its utopian – more precisely: its *eutopian* – tendency already erased, it does seem finished.² The very academic-historical intention ‘to understand just what [the Enlightenment] was’, ‘to get more of a grip on what the ideas of the Enlightenment actually were’, ‘to clarify its authentic meaning in face of the repeated attempts to manipulate and obfuscate it that have taken place in the course of the centuries down to our own time’, produces what is tantamount to its obituary (Pagden 2013: xiv; Israel 2006: v; Ferrone 2015: xiv). This confirmation that it was what it exactly was, derived from comprehensive insights that come only afterwards, both historically ratifies its existence and affirms for the historian the conceptual contentment that accompanies a recognized cultural value.

(e.) However, this conceptual contentment with accepted values actually forecloses on any reflection on the fundamental issue here. This issue is not just the shaky validity of the historicized relationship between the Enlightenment and its cognitive situation in the present. More importantly this is the Enlightenment as a case study in the relationship between knowledge and society, in how society treats the knowledge it has about itself. So it involves discovering what the Enlightenment means: its meaning – whatever it signifies – determining its cultural value, – whatever it is worth. Inevitably this fundamental issue produces a critique of the social function of the expert, specialist, academic, administrator, curator, intellectual, along with their collective connoisseurship. In particular it explores how academic practices evaluating the Enlightenment claim legitimacy for their evaluations by recourse to values derived initially from it, – another form of academic conceptual complacency.

2. Enlightenment as dissent

(a.) Because it is pre-empted by the ‘prerogatives of historical knowledge’, the Enlightenment forces a re-think (cf. Ferrone 2015: 58). It is a self-imposed obligation to think or re-think, to keep on re-thinking. Even if these ‘prerogatives’

(whatever they are) were applicable to it, it would *before all else* have to exist. *Before all else* – even prior to history’s ‘prerogatives’ – it would have to have its own existential prerogative, a latent potential, a cognitive tendency, that would underpin or transcend any possible contingent historical form it might subsequently be constrained to assume. This potential can only be dissidence, – an attitude quite remote from the conceptual complacency that structures its purely historical narrative; – a system of values antithetical to the prevailing academic culture. Further, its dissidence is tempered less by defiance than by reservation, – paradigmatically justified by what Huxley called Descartes’s ‘consecration of doubt [...] enthroning it in that high place among the primary duties’ (Huxley 1893: 169–70). This tendency can only be dissent motivated by apprehension, orientated by vigilance. The tedious volumes of the history of the Enlightenment testify to the ongoing academic domestication, the neutralization of dissenting thought. It offers a case study of how thinking that advocates in pragmatic terms general anthropic values is effectively run down by its subsequent historicizing re-functioning, by its consequent reinterpretations, amplifying it but also ephemeralizing it, – by nothing other than repeated attempts to determine what it was, to define its identity. In particular, its recourse to categorical coordinators such as ‘process’, ‘linkage’, ‘tradition’, ‘legacy’, producing historical and conceptual conformity pre-requisite for the conventions of disciplinary cognition, blocks the Enlightenment’s pragmatic cognitive purpose, its existential intention.

(b.) Dissent is the essential characteristic of Enlightenment thinking. In social-cognitive terms, its aim is ‘to cause trouble’ [*semer le trouble*] (Debray 2006: 102). It means anything but being controversial: ‘controversial’ is a sophistical judgement that admits difference but only within an affirmative social or cultural framework. Dissent refers not primarily to Enlightenment ideas and values – such as atheism, materialism, empiricism, democracy, egalitarianism, religious toleration – that, received as treacherous, did provoke retribution. (Hence, the widespread practice of clandestine publication and *philosophes* taking refuge in self-imposed exile or at foreign courts.) It must be differentiated from the revolutionary theories of knowledge that it facilitated, that nevertheless complemented it, – (e.g.) Descartes’s *Discours de la méthode* (1637), Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [*Critique of Pure Reason*] (1781/1787). Defining dissent thus avoids both the tiresome soap-opera of biography that still underpins the conventional ‘men and movements’ genre of intellectual history and the sterile quarrelling over whether or not ‘the Enlightenment’ was a unified ‘movement’ or merely the aggregate of regional and cultural variants. Rather, recognizing the Enlightenment as dissent focusses on texts, on the principles that order its discourse (e.g. ‘Man’), on its thought-style (e.g. tautology), and their ramifications and mutations (cf. Davies 2016c: 229ff., 234ff.).

Dissent, therefore, here stipulates a non-negotiable principle, diametrically opposed to conceptual complacency, to the conceptual complacency that

structures its historicized representation and evaluation: the need constantly to improve one's own capacity for judgement and evaluation; the need, therefore, to assume personal responsibility for ensuring it keeps improving. This permanent obligation for personal self-revision finds expression *inter alia* in:

- Descartes's concern in *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit* [*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*] (1627–1628) to 'develop the light of reason' [*accroître la lumière de la raison*] (Descartes 1996: 4);
- Pascal's injunction in his *Pensées* (1670) 'to work at thinking better' [*travaillons donc à mieux penser*], since the capacity for thought, constituting human dignity, is the principle of morality (Pascal 1963a: 528; §200–347);
- Spinoza's advocacy in *On the Improvement of the Understanding* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*] (1677) of finding before all else a way 'to improve the intellect and purify it as much as is possible right at the start, so that it will not be encumbered with errors and will understand things properly'. After all, the 'end and purpose' of all the sciences is 'the achievement of the highest human perfection' (Spinoza 1958: 6–7; 1925: 9);
- Locke's 'highest concernment' in *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1706) 'that great care should be taken of the understanding, to conduct it right in the search of knowledge and in the judgments it makes' (Locke 1996: 167);
- Hume's insistence on observing 'the rules of just reasoning' to make sense of events in his essay 'Of Miracles' (1741) (Hume 1971: 519);
- Diderot's assertion in his article 'Encyclopédie' (1755) that the purpose of an encyclopaedia, such as his and D'Alembert's project, is, in challenging its readers' preconceptions, and prejudices, to 'change the common way of thinking' [*changer la façon commune de penser*] (Diderot 1994a: 403);
- D'Holbach's insistence in his *Système social* (1773) on the need to 'think boldly' in order 'to distance oneself from the way the multitude or one's contemporaries think' [*Penser avec hardiesse, c'est s'écarter de la façon de penser du vulgaire et de ses contemporains*] (D'Holbach 2004a: 311);
- Kant's insistence in 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?' ['Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?'] (1784) on personal cognitive autonomy, on 'having the courage to use one's own understanding' [*Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen*], on thinking for oneself and not relying on others to represent oneself, not passively accepting the dogma of dominant institutions, not being dependent on conventional principles and formulae, the technicalities of instrumental reason – all symptoms of a self-incurred lack of personal and social maturity (Kant 1982b: 53–5).

Improving how one thinks is a means of verifying that thought and world are adequately aligned, that sufficient reason supports one's projects. The new system of values it enacts appears as dissenting opinion and dissident behaviour.

Each statement is a reflection by the respective author on his own practice, its occasion facilitated by an aphoristic, essayistic genre. Further, self-revision as a means of intellectual self-development is an essential mental tropism. Like many vital, organic functions its operation is unconscious, triggered automatically by responses from apprehension or vigilance induced by the prevailing political or cultural environment. It cannot permit itself conceptual contentment. From the outset, it disables historicization as an automatic cognitive habit. Then (if necessary) it can manipulate it as a secondary reflection, a quest for comprehension after the event, an ancillary construction.

(c.) Certainly, this conception of thinking as cognitive self-improvement synonymous with the Enlightenment renders its historical context, the eighteenth century, purely contingent. Philosophical conceptions are not defined by the historical circumstances they were produced in, but by their synchronous inter-connection and inter-action with other conceptions in a trans-temporal – trans-*historical* – always immanent mental space (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 58–9, 106–8). Hence the focus on the text, the discourse, the thought-style rather than on impressionistic, soap-opera sketches that currently supply the scholastic basis of academic reflection on Enlightenment thought. Rather these discursive features last beyond their ‘own time’; they challenge the way one thinks. They offer new ways of thinking, new cognitive incentives for reconception, but also indispensable cultural re-evaluations.

Enlightenment ideas themselves emerge through a dialectical relationship with those already articulated in Classical Greek and Roman philosophy and in scholasticism. On the one hand, it is illuminating (to take just one example) to read Kant’s inaugural dissertation *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* [*On the Forms and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*] (1770), that anticipates the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in conjunction with Aristotle’s *On the Soul* and its discussion of sensible and intelligible objects (Aristotle 1964: 178ff.). Kant’s revolutionary insight is already there in embryo. On the other, cognitive self-improvement, intending to change the common way of thinking, cannot help producing dissent. Inevitably it must both repudiate professional cognitive orthodoxy with its specialized disciplinary proprieties and transgress social thought-conventions. ‘The logic now in use has so long possessed the chair, as the only art taught in the Schools for the direction of the mind [...],’ Locke (e.g.) observes, ‘that it would perhaps be thought an affectation of novelty to suspect that rules that have served the learned world these two or three thousand years, and which, without any complaint of defects, the learned have rested in, are not sufficient to guide the understanding’ (Locke 1996: 167). The pursuit of cognitive self-improvement (as illustrated above) resists socialized intellectual lethargy susceptible as that is to ideological indoctrination. It deliberately disrupts conceptual contentment out to sabotage dissenting thought. Both apprehensive and vigilant, thinking goes against the way the world has always gone.

(d.) Dissent, though, is not solely an intellectual attitude. The intellectual effort in cognitive self-improvement is wasted if it fails to motivate dissident behaviour. Dissidence attempts to realize the ideal of mental self-improvement. This in itself is nothing new. Each theory of knowledge either comes with, or implies, a theory of ethics. Moreover, each knowledge discipline, each academic technology, enjoins a particular form of behaviour, its own way of working, its own ethos.³ Knowledge and behaviour are interdependent, but (as moral philosophy shows) their interdependence is problematic. Cognitive self-improvement, the capacity to think better, by definition demands a corresponding ethos expressed through social action. In this cognitive situation technological capability (*savoir-faire*) must support and be supported by existential self-realization (*savoir-être*) (cf. Schlanger 1990: 90).

The interdependence of knowledge and action means that thinking, in combining them, is existential: it is meant to orientate one's life-choices, to realize the values that sustain them, and to transform one's existence. It is evinced in:

- Aristotle's concept of prudence [*phronesis*] from his *Nicomachean Ethics* concerned both with theoretical knowledge and with the particular circumstances of personal and social action. It postulates the 'self-loving good man' striving to perform 'fine actions' informed by reason to benefit both himself and others; the aspiration to live in 'conformity with the highest that is in us', 'the best and most pleasant life [...] the life of the intellect, since the intellect is in the fullest sense the man' (Aristotle 1976: 213, 302, 331; §§1141b8–27, 1168b32–1169a23, 1177b33–1178a21);
- Cicero's definition of philosophy in *Tusculan Disputations* that particularly stresses its existential function and value: '[T]he whole life of the philosopher is a preparation for death'. Philosophy itself offers 'efficacious medication' for the negative emotions and feelings that produce diseases of the soul. But, above all, it is a sure guide for one's own life, a means of ethical self-orientation, and, therefore, the fundamental principle of society, culture, and civilized life (Cicero 1996: 86–7; 392–3; 428–9; I. xxx. 74; IV. xxvii. 58; V. ii. 5). For the individual philosophy provides ethical integrity [*honestas*], a comprehensive intellectual scope comprising knowledge of the universe, moral sense, and refined judgement, culminating in self-knowledge (Cicero 1996: 494–7; V. xxiv, 69–xxv. 70). But this cognitive stance is no self-engrossed indulgence: facing the 'suspicion and dislike of the multitude', the wise man for the sake of a happy, tranquil life must be vigilant to prevent the occurrence of anything unforeseen (Cicero 1996: 148–9, 368–9; II. i. 4; IV. xvii. 37–8).
- Spinoza's realization in *A Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding* (1677) that he would pursue for their own sake truth, certain knowledge, and happiness as a means of affirming the nature and power of the intellect, that it would be worthless to pursue fame since that had 'the particular drawback of forcing us to lead our lives in conformity with the opinion

- of the multitude, avoiding what men commonly avoid and pursuing what they commonly pursue' (Spinoza 1958: 4; 1925: 6).
- Fichte's assertion in *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* [Some Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar] (1794) that the academic is a 'priest of truth' [*Priester der Wahrheit*], 'the morally best person of his age' [*der sittlich beste Mensch seines Zeitalters*], representing in himself the highest achievable level of moral development: with his knowledge vindicating his essential social function as 'the teacher of humanity', the academic supervises its historical progress, its 'moral refinement' [*sittliche Veredelung*], and its political progress towards a perfect state with which all its citizens can identify, permitting them to identify with each other, and so to become – even after 'millions and millions of years' – associated with each other as a unity, as a 'single subject' (Fichte 1971a: 310–11, 328, 331, 333).

As these cases suggest, the pursuit of knowledge evinces a fundamental tropism of human behaviour: the categorical commitment to cognitive demands for the sake of existential self-transformation. The ethical proof of an existence transformed by knowledge is defined by its divergence from the cognitive norms, conceptual contentment, dubious values, let alone the ideological perversions of the 'multitude'. Sustaining this transformed existence, developing it, creating a political and cultural world conducive to it, depends on strategies of dissent.

(e.) In this context, the security of the basis of Enlightenment morality, it is worth mentioning a moral-philosophical critique of it, developed *inter alia* by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981) and John Gray in *Enlightenment's Wake* (1995). For MacIntyre the moral aspirations of the Enlightenment were bound to fail because their main components could never be adequately aligned. 'Hence', he insists, 'the eighteenth-century moral philosophers engaged in what was an inevitably unsuccessful project'. And the reason? 'They did indeed attempt to find a rational basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature, while inheriting a set of moral injunctions on the one hand and a conception of human nature on the other, which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other' (MacIntyre 2007: 55). For Gray, re-encoding and updating what could be Berlin's critique of the treacherous universalism of Enlightenment thinking, the Enlightenment had to fail, based as it was on 'the falsity of [its] philosophical anthropology'. '[Its] rationalist and universalist tradition of liberal political philosophy runs aground, along with the rest of the Enlightenment project, on the reef of value-pluralism', Gray maintains, – 'on the truth that the values embodied in different forms of life and human identity, and even within the same form of life and identity, may be rationally incommensurable' (Gray 1997: 65, 67). Both authors show that subjecting Enlightenment morality to a moral-philosophical analysis will expose only what it is designed to disclose: logical inconsistencies,

inconsistencies that acquire a quite different value when viewed pragmatically or sociologically, – the heterogeneity of modern values by another name.

Accordingly, in his *Morale universelle ou Les Devoirs de l'homme fondés sur la nature* [*Universal Morality or the Duties of Man founded upon Nature*] (1776) (e.g.) D'Holbach bases ethical values not on logical premises or inferences, but pragmatically, on personal and social behaviour. This is evinced in habit, custom, recognition for others (i.e. who turn out to be the same, his *semblable*), as well as in discussion about what virtue requires (as in D'Holbach's work itself).⁴ D'Holbach identifies a permanent, species-defining characteristic: that human beings can live only in society, but that any society they form will exhibit institutionalized inequality and injustice that he identifies and censures. In this case, he is setting out neither a theory of ethics nor a treatise on analytic philosophy but rather a work of protest and criticism directed by Nature as an ethical corrective to the world around him (D'Holbach 2004b: 579ff.; IV, iv). Virtue works only as social praxis. Take the example of promoting happiness as a social value: it is based certainly on the knowledge of one's duties but also on their practice, on one's social behaviour [*La morale [...] est l'art de rendre l'homme heureux par la connaissance et la **pratique** de ses devoirs*]. Immutable happiness, a crucial value, establishes itself from within the social agent. Far from producing dismal insensitivity, virtue is 'a measured activity that pleasantly occupies the mind without tiring it or causing it revulsion'. It is only the habitual disposition to contribute to the well-being of our fellow humans [*nos semblables*]: the virtuous human being is the one who acts to apply it [*l'homme vertueux étant celui qui met cette disposition **en usage***]. So happiness is not confined to the sociable person alone but depends on the good he or she has provided for others (D'Holbach 2004b: 761ff.; V, viii (my emphasis)).

It is, therefore, not worth insisting with MacIntyre or Gray that Enlightenment virtue has failed. Virtue always fails, since 'morality is an eternal demand hanging over consciousness' [*Moral ist [...] eine ewige Forderung, die über dem Bewußtsein hängt*]. Morality is never anything real. If it were, the whole world would be holy (Spengler 1976: 982). It has to be realized by behaviour. Sadly, as D'Holbach recognizes, this rarely happens. For example, too often those in power, endowed by Nature with a most fertile region potentially beneficial to everyone, lay it waste through their negligence, passions, and vices (D'Holbach 2004b: 770; V, viii).

(f.) Ultimately all progressive social thought happens on a knife-edge separating utopianism from nihilism. There is nothing else. D'Holbach can only stress virtue as a moral principle. Not to do so just capitulates to the vicious society that actually exists. That would mean accepting that, however technically ingenious human beings may be, they will never produce, never know how to produce, a just society for everyone: a prospect of despair. So, on the one hand, D'Holbach remains optimistic, utopian. Present circumstances may well alienate human beings from their 'true nature'. He still argues that experience and misfortune will teach them to abandon the prejudices

[*préjugés*] that deny them their happiness. He refuses to contemplate mankind in moral desperation regressing to a primitive state of nature. He recognizes that the Enlightenment will only gradually be disseminated, that it takes time for virtue to realize itself, for human affairs to correct themselves: posterity will eventually be the beneficiary. But he also admits that any change in manners might be merely a chimaera. In the end he concedes that virtue might just be something practised by each person for themselves. That would at least help him or her deal with public calamities, misfortune, wickedness, as well as sickness and death. A courageous, virtuous stance would at least afford him or her a refuge from ‘unforeseen setbacks’ [*les revers imprévus*] (D’Holbach 2004b: 773–5).

To infer, then, from this situation that the Enlightenment is finished hardly resolves D’Holbach’s situation. Just making this inference denies a vital, indispensable principle of hope. It just signifies the mental entropy of a late, comprehensively historicized culture. It is worth insisting that no idea exists for itself: it needs intellectuals to resuscitate and cultivate it especially against its demoralized opponents.

(g.) However, the behavioural connection between cognitive performance and the ethical transformation of personal existence has almost gone, – though not for MacIntyre’s and Gray’s reasons, rather for a defining feature of Modernity’s conceptual field. Fundamental tropisms of cognitive behaviour appear inoperative: the adequate existential conjunction of knowledge and behaviour; knowledge as necessarily conducive to self-reassessment; knowledge as a motive for existential self-transformation. Instead, symptomatic of cognitive performance and technological capacity (*savoir-faire*), social norms of behaviour are defined by disciplinary knowledge, by comprehensive academicization. A common example of this aspect of Modernity’s field is provided by history. When asked to vindicate the purpose of studying history, historians automatically invoke its affirmation of human values. But (despite Kant’s assurances) this academic-normative evaluation proves unexceptionable. If, as a social activity, the professional, disciplinary study of history defines what it is to be human, so too does any other form of behaviour, – as history, the story of human self-incrimination, confirms. It sets precedents for any form of behaviour and so justifies any objective or value human beings can possibly imagine. The automatic recourse to ‘what it is to be human’ is symptomatic of historical study not being justifiable by anything else, symptomatic of it being justifiable by *nothing* else.

An anthropic shift, a meta- or trans-historical reversal, or a drastic transvaluation of values hollow out this particular universal value, in fact the notion of universality itself. It defines the culture of Modernism (along with its various mutations into Postmodernism) as the cultural ethos of the all-pervasive socio-economic system of global capitalism. Enhanced by applied science and capital investment, cognitive performance in this situation does not just downplay the moral value of existential purpose: it refunctions it for its own ends.

(h.) In Enlightenment thinking Nature and Man complement each other, with Nature offering in all its forms the spectacle of beauty, harmony, and reason, thereby attesting to the influence of divine providence, guaranteeing that the world made sense, providing a meaningful structure and purpose for human existence. This is illustrated in a couplet in Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733/1734): 'The gen'ral ORDER, since the whole began/Is kept in Nature, and is kept in Man' (Pope 1983: 246; ll.171–2). However, maintaining the mega-machine society has become superseded any primary concern for ethical or existential development now in any case dependent on it. This tension characterizes Modernity's conceptual field in which the concept of Enlightenment is embedded. For Huxley in 'Evolution and Ethics' (1893) 'the history of civilization details the steps by which men have succeeded in building up an artificial world within the cosmos' (Huxley 1911: 83). It reveals the imposition of a specifically human order on nature and the marginalization of the adequacy of mind and nature. Dismissing Pascal's description of Man as a vulnerable 'thinking reed', Huxley asserts within Man 'a fund of energy, operating intelligently and so far akin to that which pervades the universe, that it is competent to influence and modify the cosmic process', so that 'in virtue of his intelligence, the dwarf bends the Titan to his will' (Huxley 1911: 83–4; cf. Pascal 1963a: 528; §200–347). The progress of human civilization automatically entails restraining the cosmic process – 'by law and custom' as well as 'by the art of the shepherd, the agriculturalist, the artisan'. Consequently, 'the organized and highly developed sciences and arts of the present day have endowed man with a command over the course of non-human nature greater than that once attributed to the magicians' (Huxley 1911: 84). For Huxley, therefore, this cognitive stance is axiomatic: 'Let us understand, once and for all', he insists, 'that the ethical progress of society depends not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in *combating* it' (Huxley 1911: 83 (my italics)). Certainly, he admits that 'to pit the microcosm against the macrocosm and to set man to *subdue nature* to his higher ends' is 'an audacious proposal' (Huxley 1911: 83 (my italics)). But precisely here, his whole argument depends on a historical judgement. The judgement testifies to the inherent unreliability of historicized thinking. Seeing itself as historically progressive, it can indulge itself in its conceptual contentment, – as when Huxley remarks: 'I venture to think that the greatest intellectual difference between the *ancient times* with which we have been occupied and *our day*, lies in the *solid foundation* we have acquired for the *hope* that such an enterprise may meet with a *certain measure of success*' (Huxley 1911: 83 (my italics)). The difference between 'ancient times' and 'our day' is, though, not as great as here implied. Here too the grand liberal design evidently lacks the courage of its convictions.⁵ The envisaged 'success' will manifest itself only in a 'certain measure', in unspecified dimensions; the 'solid foundation' actually only supports 'hope'. Now, in the light of environmental disasters, the destruction of habitats and the species that depend on them, and the evidence for global

warming, it seems clear that the idea of combating nature – here endorsed by a historicizing judgement – far from manifesting itself in a ‘certain measure’ of success, has proved catastrophic.

Thus *techne*, as a ‘productive state that is truly reasoned’, produces objects that depend on the aleatory, hence variable intentions of the producer (not on nature which reproduces itself) (Aristotle 1976: 208, 1140a1–230). Bringing into being objects derived from human ratiocination, this cognitive stance is pre-requisite for constructing an ‘artificial world within the cosmos’. It is distinct from other crucial facets of human existence, from action with its moral implications, from contemplation as an intellectual stance, and from wisdom [*sophia*] ‘the most finished form of knowledge’ (Aristotle 1976: 211; 1140b33–1141a19). But the civilized world produced by human effort [*techne*] against the cosmos is indeed successful only in a ‘certain measure’ (since it cannot be assumed to be adequate) and totally inadequate in ethical-existential terms. So the technical expertise required to manage it needs to arrogate to itself the scope of comprehension immediately available to metaphysical contemplation. But, since it only ever enjoys a ‘certain measure’ of success and can never view this artificial world in its final, comprehensive form, it is perpetually seeking a ‘better understanding’, a ‘fuller picture’, objectives that at least create an illusion of cognitive value and existential purpose.

For technical expertise the only other recourse is to amplify its social-cognitive function. The world that creates itself against the cosmos, that combats and subdues Nature, requires a vast range of specialists, technicians, academics, engineers, researchers, that – armed with instrumental reason – organize human existence through science, technology, the human sciences, administration, and political and economic governance. Consequently – as Ortega y Gasset observes – there is a ‘kind of man to be found today in all social classes, who consequently represents our age, in which he is the predominant ruling power’. This social type ‘who imposes the form of his own mind on the period’ is ‘without a doubt the technician: engineer, doctor, financier, teacher, and so on’. Moreover, the ‘best and purest’ representative of this group is the ‘generic type of “man of science,” the high-point of European humanity’ (Ortega y Gasset 1993: 108). This type becomes socially, politically paradigmatic: ‘[M]odern science, the root and symbol of our actual civilization, finds a place for the intellectually commonplace man and allows him to work therein with success’ (Ortega y Gasset 1993: 110–11). In terms of cultural philosophy, in this case Oswald Spengler, this mass social investment in a technical world-view evinces a materialistic, Faustian drive for knowledge (Spengler 1976: 939–40, 1059ff.).

(i.) Once philosophy focussed on existentially radical knowledge since it contemplated ‘Being *qua* Being’ motivated by intellectual self-fulfilment and moral self-concern (Aristotle 1996b: 159, 1005a). Now – the very parody of contemplation, a comprehensive veneer on the cognitive amplification of specialized topics, the confirmation of education as a social and personal

good – studiousness is a social practice fostered in the multitude by the institutions of social governance. It is the Aristotelian stance in vulgar form. Hardly vindicating Enlightenment thinking, this, the current situation, demonstrates why it must be dissident. Knowledge that is technical, specialized – in a word: academic – is a most sophisticated instrument of social regulation that excludes anything different, anything else.

This cultural diremption between cognitive capability and ethical self-transformation is latent in Enlightenment thinking. Experimental verification, and with that the certainty, the reliability of knowledge, seemed promised by geometry, mathematics, and the natural sciences. This modern cognitive performance, already far exceeding the achievements of Antiquity, redefined the existential function of knowledge. Certainly it could be seen as enhancing it. Evidently, though, even if cognitive performance were an existential enhancement, it lacks ethical value. Instead it signifies a dilemma endemic in the structure of modern knowledge: its alienation from human species-essential interests and the everyday world everyone inhabits, – as when in Brecht's drama, *Leben des Galilei* [*The Life of Galileo*] (1938/1939), Galileo himself observes that science itself is in a sorry state once the unprecedented achievements of technical expertise are met with a 'universal scream of horror' from the people (cf. Brecht 1968: 126). Accordingly, therefore, enlightened thinking attempts to resolve this diremption – as (e.g.) in the case of Vico and Kant.

In *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* [*On the Study Methods of Our Time*] (1709) Vico advocates 'teaching the totality of the sciences and arts' for the sake of 'developing the students' intellectual powers to the full', thereby 'strengthening their common sense so that they can grow in prudence and eloquence' (Vico 1965: 19; 1709: 28). He still maintains the academic ideal of comprehensive knowledge. But he regrets that the prevailing educational methods 'pay an excessive amount of attention to the natural sciences and not enough to ethics'. 'Since', he continues, 'the only target of our intellectual endeavors is truth, we devote all our efforts to the investigation of physical phenomena, because their nature seems unambiguous; but we fail to inquire into human nature which, because of the freedom of man's will, is difficult to determine' (Vico 1965: 33; 1709: 45–6). His thinking anticipates the divergence between self-centred disciplinary knowledge and species-essential interests, the regulation of everyday life by academic-scientific expertise (as Husserl subsequently demonstrated), the preference for technical calculation over Aristotelian *phronesis*. As Vico observes: '[I]t is an error to apply to the prudent conduct of life the abstract criterion of reasoning that obtains in the domain of science'. He discovers a fundamental cognitive mismatch amongst 'doctrinaires' [*sapientes*] that 'judge human actions as they *ought* to be, not as they actually are (i.e. performed more or less at random)'; he stresses their unethical stance, in that 'satisfied with abstract truth alone [they] do not bother to find out [...] whether the things that are truths to them are also such to other people' (Vico 1965: 35; 1709: 49). But, above all, he identifies a historical disjunction or disequilibrium in

Enlightenment knowledge. Current scientific knowledge may well excel that of the Ancients; by contrast, ‘in the fields of wisdom and eloquence’ (necessary for managing the social and political worlds, the realm of prudence) modern thinkers have yet to prove themselves their equal (Vico 1965: 41; 1709: 59–60). In the same conceptual field Thomas Carlyle in his essay ‘Signs of the Times’ (1829) censures the development of a Mechanical Age instead of a Philosophical or Moral Age. He rejects what he calls ‘the grand characteristic of our age’ diagnosed thus: ‘By our skill in Mechanism, it has come to pass, that in the management of external things we excel all other ages; while in whatever respects the pure moral nature, in true dignity of soul and character, we are perhaps inferior to most civilised ages’ (Carlyle 1857: 100, 111). He adds that this culture of Mechanism indicates ‘a mighty change in our whole manner of existence’. It infiltrates all aspects of social behaviour: social and political institutions, cultural organizations such as art academies and literary gatherings, and not least ‘modes of thought and feeling’. So existence loses its natural dynamic (from Schopenhauer’s perspective), becomes conventional and uniform (in Nietzsche’s view), and bereft of enchantment (with Weber’s evaluation). This means that ‘while civil liberty is more and more secured to us, our moral liberty is all but lost. Practically considered, our creed is Fatalism; and free in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul with far straiter than feudal chains’ (Carlyle 1857: 102–3, 108, 112, 115).

There is, therefore, no resisting the historicizing potential of natural science, its capacity – as it develops and specializes – for questioning the adequacy of the relationship between mind and world, for rendering current knowledge obsolete and consigning it to history. And, unless it turns to its history as a substitute, science itself – including the human sciences as technical disciplines classifying documentary evidence – cannot offer any guidance for ethical behaviour. It cannot connect with the existential basis of personal life. Its moral relevance and its existential basis depend rather arbitrarily on how the scientist, the technical expert, instrumentalizes what they know, how they decide to make it work whether or not they themselves collaborate with things being the way they are. Kant confronts precisely this divergence. His essay *Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbenjahre, von 1765–1766* [Information on the Organization of his Lectures in the Winter Semester 1765–1766] confirms his intention to teach students to think for themselves rather than learn about what to think, to learn how to be a philosopher rather than learn about philosophy. Thus he still affirms the Aristotelian ideal of prudence: the existential commitment, based on science, towards becoming a scholar [*Gelehrte*] as preparation for managing one’s life. Otherwise, acquiring merely ‘second-hand knowledge’ [*erborgte Wissenschaft*] as though from scholastic ‘adhesion’ [*gleichsam geklebt*] rather than organic development, students leave university with the ‘delusion of knowledge’ [*Wahn von Weisheit*], ‘the capacities of their natural disposition’ [*Gemütsfähigkeiten*] now corrupted and de-sensitized (Kant 1977a: 907–8). Kant’s concern here is ethical and existential. But nearly two decades later, in ‘Answer

to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', his position has become equivocal. On the one hand, he still asserts individual autonomy construed as the capacity to think for oneself, hence to adopt a critical cognitive stance. On the other, he re-defines the scope of critically justified autonomous thinking. Certainly, the ethical-existential imperative persists: as a human being and citizen, the individual should be able to address the public on matters of public concern. However, on matters relating to the individual's professional or technical function within social institutions (e.g. the army, the state, the church), he is not allowed to use his reasoning [*nicht erlaubt zu rasonnieren*], but must remain passive, obedient, so that their institutional mechanisms fulfil the purpose of ensuring the well-being of society as a whole or at least do not frustrate it (Kant 1982b: 55–6). Certainly, if the public use of reason promotes Enlightenment, its private, institutionalized use at least does not hinder it (*ibid.*). However, this situation demonstrates that knowledge as a technical, professionally conformist arrangement of the world and knowledge as ethical-existential insight are irreconcilable. Kant's attempts at reconciliation are not convincing. In the guise of scholars [*Gelehrte*], those with a professional vocation – e.g. the army officer, the priest, the government official – can publicly criticize in academic terms the institutions they work in. But this only shows technics and ethics as irreconcilable. The diremption between professional conformity and public dissidence constitutes acceptable social-cognitive behaviour (cf. Kant 1982b: 56).

(j.) Both Vico's and Kant's attempts fail. The material performance of professional expertise (i.e. *savoir-faire*) is more evident – i.e. calculable, quantifiable – than the 'spiritual' attainment of ethical ideals (*savoir-être*). The ethical thus becomes nothing else but ideal; however – by way of compensation – its ideal value stimulates dissidence as a response to social realities. Conversely, technical performance supervised by professional expertise itself gauges human potential, claims its own ethical-existential validation, and so offers conceptual contentment. Within the conceptual field of the Enlightenment in particular and of Modernity in general this is illustrated strikingly also by the thinking of T.H. Huxley as in 'A Liberal Education and Where to Find It (1868)'. Significantly, where Carlyle protests against the mechanization of culture and society, Huxley promotes it. The concept of a liberal education he esteems is evinced in a 'man [...] who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a *mechanism*, it is capable of' (my italics). Here the industrialization of the human situation, suggested by the metaphor 'mechanism', is developed in the rest of the definition. So, through the instrumentalization of thought indifferent to the purposes it serves, the educated intellect manifests itself as 'a clear cold logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in *smooth working order*; ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to *any type of work*, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the *anchors* of the mind' (my italics). So, too, 'stored with a knowledge of the great and fundamental *truths* of Nature and of the *laws* of her operations',

the mind becomes a repository of the eidetic commodities thus mechanically produced (my italics). Contrasting with this formidable technological dynamic, aesthetic and ethical qualities appear ‘soft’, as mitigating stabilizers balanced against each other, and ultimately – as their ethical purpose – assimilating ‘others’ to ‘oneself’. So the ‘educated man’ is ‘one who, *no stunted ascetic*, is *full of life and fire*, but whose *passions* are *trained* to come to heel by a *vigorous will*, the servant of a *tender conscience*; who has learned to *love all beauty*, whether of Nature or of art, to *hate all vileness*, and to respect others as himself’ (Huxley 1905: 86 (my italics)).

In this short paragraph Huxley displays the comprehensive scope of knowledge available to the autonomous individual. But comprehension, by definition, relies on the technical expertise, the disciplinary specialization, that maintains not just the ‘clear cold logic engine’ or the ‘steam engine’ but also the socio-economic world they themselves sustain. Inevitably ethical and aesthetic values, though species-essential, are reduced to being a complementary ornamentation, the knowledge system’s final touch, the achievement – at least in the construction of his paragraph – of conceptual contentment. No wonder it is bereft of the existential pathos characteristic of moralist thinking (such as in the works – *inter alia* – of Cicero or Pascal).

Technical knowledge has no inherent ethical dimension, – just often awkward ethical implications. Its maximum performativity diminishes existential-ethical motivation. Its proficient use is indifferent to what it facilitates or expedites. Produced by the human species’ impatience with nature, with the insignificance of the human life-span on the temporal scale disclosed by geology and evolution, and with the physiological and psychological limitations of the human organism itself, it subverts humanism as the ethical value of last resort (cf. Blumenberg 1974: 263). Instead, it affirms itself and its successful functioning in terms of its own rationale (e.g. a ‘liberal education’), defined as that is by specialized, disciplinary norms. As comprehensive knowledge conceptually self-contented, it blocks anything extraneous, anything radically disruptive.

But here too the Enlightenment as dissent, as cognitive discontent, proves indispensable. It triggers an essential self-correcting cognitive reflex, especially if it derives from problematic tendencies originating within Enlightenment thinking itself. It does not just oppose the cultural bad faith of a still not enlightened world. It also expresses reservation towards its own historically contingent, still ‘unfinished’ manifestations (such as Modernity, the modern world). Specialized technical expertise, comprehensive administrative identification, conceptual contentment may well now be the prevailing cognitive norm. Historians, as technical experts and comprehensive administrators, may well now identify themselves with the Enlightenment in its eighteenth-century configuration. Still, thinking orientated by Enlightenment principles – thinking better, thinking against the prevailing common way of thinking – is defined by its capacity to dissent from any arbitrarily historicized description

of itself: its dissidence proving its enlightening purpose. Dissent – as the essential cognitive stance of the Enlightenment – expresses deference to its future finality. But much more it vindicates this finality enacted as cognitive dissidence now.

3. At the limits of comprehension

(a.) Intellectual complacency arises from conceptual contentment. Its ratification? The academic stance. The overdetermination of an abstract universal (i.e. ‘what it means to be human’) is its defining characteristic. It expresses the need to amplify an abstract universal by means of multiple determinations (i.e. ‘a field of values’). This affirms complacency and contentment. It blocks the misgiving that the abstract universal is unbelievable or too abstract.

The Enlightenment (as Pagden says) ‘was about creating a field of values, political, social, and moral, – based upon a detached and scrupulous understanding as far as the human mind is capable – of what it means to be human’. This premise simply affirms the currently normative concept of knowledge, hence the currently normative model of self-orientation. So (Pagden continues) ‘today most educated people, at least in the West, broadly accept the conclusions to which it [i.e. the Enlightenment] led. Most generally believe that it is possible to improve, through knowledge and science, the world in which we live’ (Pagden 2013: 343).

However, this concluding ‘general belief’ cancels the argument. ‘Most educated people’ already belong to a broad and influential social group of technocrats, specialists, technicians, academics, engineers, and researchers. As mentioned earlier, they already organize human existence through science and technology. They determine the way the world is. As social, economic, and political administrators they rely on instrumentalized human sciences. It would be more remarkable if they did *not* believe knowledge and science, not least *their* knowledge and science, would improve the world *they* lived in. Their belief in the ethical intention of knowledge and science merely reinforces their personal and professional self-interest. So ‘most educated people’ will be those with whom the author already identifies (since he himself belongs to that group), those who already identify with the author, those whose qualifications legitimize their function as guardians, curators, and managers of the ‘artificial world within the cosmos’, in other words those least likely, *especially* in their public use of reason, to voice any dissent.⁶ Instead, the socially normative effect of science merely reaffirms the abstract universal that ultimately motivates it. With this belief, these ‘most educated people’ ‘also believe that there exists a “human nature” – although few today would employ such a term – which is much the same everywhere’ (Pagden 2013: 343–4). But, be it in relation to the individual or to ‘humanity’, the liberal ideal here too lacks the courage of its convictions. It senses that its ideal is now perhaps too ideal, – a ‘human nature’ inarticulate in its own terms yet evidently *almost* uniform.

Thus intellectual contentment disregards its inherent inadequacies. It exemplifies the instrumental or administrative view of knowledge, what Sorel calls the ‘bourgeois conception of science’: it functions as a ‘mill which produces solutions for all the problems one confronts’. Accordingly ‘science is no longer considered to be a perfected manner of acquiring knowledge, but only as a recipe for procuring certain advantages for oneself’ (Sorel 1981: 173). This tendency towards self-serving instrumental science [cf. *techne*] is inevitable once the human world is construed as an artificial world that to maintain itself must combat nature, – that must, therefore, acquire knowledge about nature for the sake of combating it. To the liberal mind motivated by comprehension this is an inordinate cultural achievement. It is, though, the very façade of an unfathomable apprehension. Formulated in terms of a self-contented asceticism, the requisite cognitive stance – ‘a detached and scrupulous understanding as far as the human mind is capable’ – mutates into existential liability.

(b.) Textual comparisons reveal this conceptual mutation as human technical competence increases. There is in the Enlightenment the strong conviction to deter combating nature, – as in Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1733/1734) or in Rousseau’s observation in *Émile ou de l’éducation* (1762) that ‘everything coming from the hands of the Author of things is good, everything in human hands degenerates’ (Rousseau 1966: 35). In fact, as D’Alembert argues, given the inadequacy of mind to reality, only parts of the providential order are actually perceivable. So, far from combating this natural order, the cognitive and metaphysical aspiration was to infer its transcendental structure from its available disparate components (D’Alembert 2011b: 236–8). As with Leibniz’s argument that this world is the best of all possible worlds that God could have created, the world of nature – viewed as a ‘world machine’ [*machine du monde*] within the metaphysical context of theodicy – and the artificial world created by Man (as an excellent geometrician, a good architect, a good father to his family, a clever mechanic [*un habile machiniste*], and a learned author [*un savant auteur*]) inevitably complemented each other (cf. Leibniz 1969a: 91; 1969b: 94; 2001: 209–10; §V).

It takes, therefore, a materialistic philosophy to disrupt this metaphysical complacency, as in D’Holbach’s *Le Système de la Nature ou Lois du monde physique et du monde moral* [*The System of Nature or Laws of the Physical World and of the Moral World*] (1770). Here Nature has a numinous, *quasi* divine status, – a force generated by a self-governing mechanism. Accordingly, Nature is ‘a vast circle of generation and destruction, combination and decomposition’, or ‘an immense chain of cause and effects flowing from each other’ (D’Holbach 2008: 24; I, ii). Nature is a permanent presence, a ‘universal magazine’ [*magasin universel*]. Within materialism there is a self-sustaining, vital principle – operating under its own laws – creating the cosmos but also the teeming variety of all forms of life, including the human species whose own existence depends on laws it has made, motivated by, and within the context of, Nature (D’Holbach 2008: 30–1; I, iii).

Certainly, human society is conceived as a product of Nature, as a structure embedded in it. But Nature here implies more than just a comprehensive ethical principle, a social norm antithetical to the development of the autonomous individual. Instead, it is driven by its own, vital force. Within the conceptual field of Modernity and the functional relationships it offers, D'Holbach's Nature lends itself to being re-encoded in various ways: as Spinoza's 'striving' [*conatus*] by which each thing perseveres in being its actual essence; as Schopenhauer's, Hartmann's, or Nietzsche's 'will' [*Wille*, *Wille zur Macht*]; as Bergson's 'vital impulse' [*élan vital*]; or, with Deleuze and Guattari, as the unconscious automatically productive in its operation, given that 'the vital organs are a *working machine*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1972: 14). Deleuze and Guattari also see no distinction between man and nature: '[T]he human essence of nature and the natural essence of man identify with each other in nature as production or industry, in other words in the generic life of man'. This means that industry is 'not taken as an extrinsic connection of utility' but rather as 'its fundamental identity with nature as the production of man by man himself' [*son identité fondamentale avec la nature comme production de l'homme et par l'homme*] (Deleuze and Guattari 1972: 10). The same conceptual field that relates Carlyle's culture of 'Mechanism' with Huxley's conception of the conscious mind as 'a clear cold logic engine' ironically affirms and fulfils both by assimilating them to the machine-like unconscious. Left to nature the human being would be a vulnerable 'body without organs' driven by desire in desolate circumstances. It must become what Freud in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* [*Civilization and Its Discontents*] (1930) calls a repressed 'prosthesis god' (Freud 1977: 87). To satisfy his desires Man naturally plugs his otherwise helpless body into the mega-machine of industrial production. What Huxley calls 'subduing nature to [man's] higher ends' thus mutates into merging with it as a machine indispensable for natural life-support.

Thus, reliant on providential design, nature's metaphysical priority diminishes as, fuelled by capitalism, the world of human artifice [cf. *techne*] expands. As Carlyle's protestations suggest, this cultural phenomenon signifies a drastic shift in cultural values. Here the diremption between philosophical thought and social action is crucial, – as Macaulay recognizes in his essay on 'Lord Bacon' (1837) that ratifies this transvaluation of values. Its premise is that 'a man who wants to contrive a new machine or a new medicine has a strong motive to observe accurately and patiently, and to try experiment after experiment'. Conversely 'a man who merely wants a theme for disputation or declamation has no such motive. He is therefore content with premises grounded on assumption, or on the most scanty and hasty induction' (Macaulay 1883: 407). But – as Macaulay implies – Bacon's critique of scholasticism does not leave philosophy as a logical mode of self-reflection, of existential-ethical self-revision, unscathed, since it targets essential cognitive stances: i.e. 'foolish premises' can be argued on 'with great ability'; 'just as much logical skill could be shown in reasoning on false as on true premises'; but (in terms of the present argument) most seriously their consistent object was 'to be victorious in

controversy, not to be victorious over nature' (ibid.). Hence a further implication seems fundamental: philosophy was always – is always – going to be trumped by the 'mechanical arts' [cf. *techné*]: '[T]he mechanic was not content with so careless a mode of induction as served the purpose of the philosopher'. Conversely, 'the philosopher [was] more easily satisfied than the mechanic' because 'the object of the mechanic was to mould things [e.g. "a good shoe"], whilst the object of the philosopher was only to mould words [e.g. "a good syllogism"]' (Macaulay 1883: 407–8).

Further, the results of action, unlike those of theoretical argument, are immediately evident, as Macaulay emphasizes in enumerating the changes brought about by Bacon's experimental empiricism, driven as it was by common sense and the 'vulgar useful': – in *biological* terms ('it has lengthened life; it has mitigated pain; it has extinguished diseases; it has increased the fertility of the soil'); – in terms of producing a *habitable world* ('it has given new securities to the mariner; it has furnished new arms to the warrior; it has spanned great rivers and estuaries with bridges of form unknown to our fathers; it has guided the thunderbolt innocuously from heaven to earth; it has lighted up the night with the splendour of the day'); – in terms of amplifying *human physical capacities* ('it has extended the range of human vision; it has amplified the power of human muscles; it has accelerated motion; it has annihilated distance'); – in *socio-economic* terms ('it has facilitated intercourse, correspondence, all friendly offices, all dispatch of business'); finally, in terms of developing an unprecedented *global sense* of the human habitat ('it has enabled man to descend to the depths of the sea, to soar into the air, to penetrate securely into the noxious recesses of the earth, to traverse the land in cars which whirl along without horses, and the ocean in ships which run ten knots an hour against the wind') (Macaulay 1883: 400). Moreover, possessed of its own ineluctable dynamic: this experimental stance drives 'a philosophy that never rests, which has never attained, which is never perfect'. Emphatically, 'its law is progress' (ibid.).

But precisely this convergence of natural science, experimental method, technical expertise, and its compulsive dynamic breeds unconsciously a momentous cultural-psychological trauma. Just when human cultural endeavour spectacularly affirms itself, the limitations of its comprehension expose themselves: the euphonic proclamation of disciplinary rigour (cf. 'detached and scrupulous understanding') is qualified by a typical liberal equivocation (cf. 'as far as the human mind is capable'). Just when nature as a means of human self-orientation is repudiated by technological accomplishments, it becomes clear that the human comprehension of nature will never compensate for thereby losing its metaphysical-providential reassurance. The artificial world achieved by progress in the mechanical arts may well be splendid, but it is all there is. There is nothing else.

(c.) The resulting apprehension is triggered by cognitive inadequacies inherent in the human mind and the fallacies they produce through 'detached

understanding' conjoined with technical potential. This situation becomes evident in the 'law of progress', sustained by the 'mechanical arts', that keeps transforming the world beyond recognition.

α. The very idea of comprehensive knowledge – be it defined as a cultural system by the 'humanities' (Vico), be it discerned as a providential system by induction (D'Alembert) – proves to be an illusion. 'Scrupulous understanding' also underpins critical logical and methodological reflections on the natural and human sciences. In this function it rejects the very concept of definitive comprehension. It thus turns upon itself and negates its cognitive aspiration. According to Otto Neurath in 'Einheit der Wissenschaft als Aufgabe' ['The Unity of Science as an Objective'] (1934), there is no single system that can represent the 'real world'. With everything being ambivalent and indeterminate, the concept of a system is 'the great scientific lie' [*"Das" System ist die große wissenschaftliche Lüge*] (Neurath 1994: 376). Hence, 'science as a whole is always fundamentally open to debate' (Neurath 1994: 379). According to Ludwik Fleck in 'Wissenschaftstheoretische Probleme' ['Problems in Scientific Theory'] (1946), no science contains an objective image of the world or even a part of such an image. If it did so (he says), science would remain stable and only increase as knowledge increased. But, in fact, experience shows that science as a 'comprehensive whole' [*als Ganzheit*] is constantly changing. Otherwise 'science' is a blanket-term for a host of technical specialisms with little connection with each other and often divergent characteristics. It by no means implies 'a uniform and unified comprehensive totality' [*die Wissenschaften [setzen sich] nicht zu einer gleichförmigen, einheitlichen Ganzheit zusammen*] (Fleck 1983: 128).⁷ So now the affirmation of a belief in improving the world through 'knowledge and science' appears occlusive. It is all the more the ethical incentive of the technocrat – of academics, administrators, managers, and technicians and experts – esteemed for being ineffective.

β. The metaphysical vindication of an 'artificial world within the cosmos' achieved by 'subduing nature' comes from Kant's theory of knowledge and subsequently from the comprehensive cognitive systems of German idealism (Fichte, Hegel, Schelling). As Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; 1787) argues, the human world is generated by cognitive procedures, mental structures, and laws of thought. Appropriately enough, human beings live in a world of pure appearance, creating for themselves a world of phenomena. But it does permit them to aspire to personal, ethical autonomy, thereby subduing the instinctive, unconscious part of nature in human nature: to act on rational principles in the interest of the species as a whole rather than to pursue narrow self-interests or to indulge in irrational licence. Fundamental to this vision is the restricted capability of the human mind, the limits of pure reason: there are ultimate issues – as in the antinomies of reason – which are undecidable; it cannot even decide if God exists or not, though for ethical reasons, it needs to operate as though He does. So, already pre-determined by its location in time and space, the mind cannot know the objective world – nature itself – in its

own objectivity [*Ding an sich*] that sustains the artificial world thus constructed. However, in empirical terms by experimental methods, ‘mechanics’ producing things that in themselves reconfigure the *a priori* coordinates of time and space invert and re-function this ideal theoretical-metaphysical structure. What Macaulay recognizes, Gertrude Stein subsequently confirms in her observation that by the twenty-first century ‘everybody will have been as quickly everywhere as anybody can be’: the products of human artifice [*techne*] demonstrate the accelerating potential of human autonomy in all spheres of activity (cf. Stein 1974: 112). The albeit limited autonomy that ideally offered human intellectual self-orientation with a moral end, mutates into instrumentally dynamic disorientation without end; – as a TV advertisement (March 2016) showing the historical development of the latest thing, the latest Samsung cell-phone, then the Samsung Galaxy S7, concludes: ‘Who knows where progress will take us?’⁸ For Kant constituting the ‘consciousness of his existence’ [*das Bewußtsein meiner Existenz*] supported by ‘the moral law within him’ and the ‘star-studded heavens above him’ [*der bestirnte Himmel über mir und das moralische Gesetz in mir*], the galactic view on which the advert closes offers an experience of the sublime, the sublime that, as Kant – but evidently *not* the phone-manufacturers – realized, can trigger sheer terror (cf. Kant 1967: 188; 1968: 116–17).

γ. The technical potential of human autonomy is subverted not just by the illusion of comprehension and by its own disorientation, – in other words, by the cognitive limitations of its conceptual contentment (here its symptomatic conviction of progress). What also offsets it never comes into consciousness: the vital impetus of the unconscious as a machine running on a life-sustaining force – a will, an impulse – of nature.

In particular, in *Die Philosophie des Unbewußten* [*The Philosophy of the Unconscious*] (1876), Hartmann identifies Leibniz’s thinking in his *Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement* [*New Essays on the Understanding*] and in the *Monadologie* as defining the importance of the unconscious: as the pre-established harmony of body and soul in the monad, it connects every living creature with the rest of the universe (Hartmann 1876: I: 14–16). He sees the unconscious as an organic, monistic entity that compels all living forms – from the most simple to the most complex – to produce their myriad individual characteristics (Hartmann 1876: II: 256). Where human beings are concerned, it creates illusions – forms of happiness in the present, in the world to come, and in the future of the ‘world-process’ – that make life worth living. However, human consciousness, the logic of human intentions, as it develops exposes this quest for happiness as illusory, potentially leaving human beings destitute (Hartmann 1876: II: 294). This pessimism is vindicated by the ever-ongoing world-process, a conflict between the world constructed (in terms of its content) by human conscious intention and the unconscious will that maintains the world’s existence (Hartmann 1876: II: 450). The notion, therefore, that disciplined, ratiocinating individuals (e.g. technicians, administrators, managers, academics, i.e. ‘most educated people’) by virtue of representations generated by technical

rationation alone determine the basis of human reality is also illusory. These individuals, like all individuals, are in fact epiphenomena of the unconscious which sustains their existence: they are ‘objectively posited phenomena, [...] intended thoughts of the unconscious or certain of its intentional acts’ [*objektive gesetzte Erscheinungen [...] gewollte Gedanken des Unbewussten oder bestimmte Willensacte desselben*] (Hartmann 1876: II: 256).

Thus the liberal, individualistic world-view, personal autonomy turbocharged by technical performance, reveals its fallibility. Hartmann’s pessimism repudiates its conceptual self-contentment with a Hegelian dynamic. The ‘artificial world’ demonstrating in its development human autonomy conflicts with the unconscious. If this conflict ends with the triumph of the logical intellect over the will, ultimately affirms happiness, and redeems human beings from the ‘suffering of existence’ [*Erlösung von der Qual des Daseins*], the world-process will have ended (Hartmann 1876: II: 397). What maintains the artifice of an ‘artificial world’, what Hartmann calls ‘the total instrumental scaffolding of the world’ [*das gesammte Zweckgerüst der Welt*], is not human technical ingenuity but the unconscious will immanent in the existence of things and, therefore, endowed with prophetic insight, with clairvoyance [*Hellsehen*] into what its existence requires (Hartmann 1876: II: 274). Countenancing the radical influence of the unconscious leads to scepticism towards the achievements of human technology and its self-contented anthropocentrism. Technology [*Technik*] (according to Hartmann) has hardly contributed to human happiness. Contrary to (e.g.) Macaulay in his eulogy on Bacon, he asserts: ‘Factories, steam-ships, railways and telegraphs have not yet achieved anything *positive* for humanity’s happiness, they have reduced only some of the impediments and inconveniences by which human beings were constrained and oppressed’ [*Fabriken, Dampfschiffe, Eisenbahnen und Telegraphen haben noch nichts Positives für das Glück der Menschheit geleistet, sie haben nur einen Theil der Hindernisse und Unbequemlichkeiten, von welchen der Mensch eingeengt und bedrückt war, vermindert*] (Hartmann 1876: II: 383).

Technocracy and its disciplinary orthodoxy, whatever its value or achievements, does marginalize the existential-ethical purpose of knowledge. But this technocratic expertise deludes itself. Though it might make no concessions to ethics, its instrumental rationality is self-subversive. Arguably, the moral deficit of the Enlightenment arises from thinking too much, prompted by the apprehension that reason will never be sufficient to realize its ends (Hartmann 1876: I: 359). Powerless before the unconscious as the vital principle of human and natural life, rationalization and technocracy can only yield to its obscurity, the source of all ethical concerns and the evaluation of the attitudes and behaviour that constitute each person: ‘[T]he ethical moment of man [...] lies in the deepest night of the unconscious’ [*das ethische Moment des Menschen [...] liegt in der tiefsten Nacht des Unbewußten*] (Hartmann 1876: I: 230). Hence, to establish a cognitive and ethical basis, the Enlightenment’s recourse to Nature, a precious but also precarious combination of intellectually accountable providence, on the one hand, and the vital force sustaining all life, on the other.

4. Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, and the psychogenesis of nihilism

(a.) How a society uses its available knowledge has several aspects. It might fundamentally be society's self-knowledge: that does not mean it necessarily works rationally, systematically, let alone in the interest of the Enlightenment. Rather it is evaluated, and so neutralized, by existing cognitive habits and conventional disciplinary paradigms, not least the automatic recourse to historicize. For this reason its implications might equally be met with denial or with idealism. But it does need to be evaluated to determine what it means, especially what it means for it, – its sense, its inherent import, what its purpose might be, what purposes it might serve. Not least its underlying world-view [*Weltanschauung*] must be clarified and evaluated to expose what drives it. Already each of these aspects can provoke political conflict. A further aspect and a source of conflict appear with the question of exactly who is entitled to define its meaning and value: whether it devolves to technocratic specialists or to reserved intellectuals, to those who affirm the prevailing social order or to those who censure it, suspicious of its implicit ideological tendencies. The social reception of knowledge seems so conflicted that it seems it could hardly advocate any Enlightenment values.

However, issues such as these are evinced in the Enlightenment; historians have long since mapped them in detail. Here it suffices to mention that conflict constitutes the Enlightenment's conceptual consistency: the plurality of its values is symptomatic of its Modernity. Conflict arose between differences of outlook and cultural values of the *philosophes* themselves, such as that – perhaps most prominently – between Voltaire and Rousseau. In particular, it arose also as a clash of existential meaning and cultural values between religious institutions supporting the *ancien régime* and philosophical reconceptions of religion and religious beliefs. These could encompass (e.g.) both Spinoza's pantheism and Leibniz's theodicy; or Spinoza and Leibniz (on the one hand) and Hume's reservation towards religion in *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), or the radical recourse to mechanism and materialism demonstrated by La Mettrie in *L'Homme machine* [*Man the Machine*] (1748) (on the other).

These conflicts internal to the Enlightenment provoked external conflict with its antithesis, the Counter-Enlightenment. To define it requires forgoing historicized evaluation. Conventionally a historicized perspective sees it arise as the Enlightenment sinks into revolution, regicide, and war. It is, though, a historicist fallacy to assert that the Counter-Enlightenment opposed the Enlightenment just because it succeeded it. Rather the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment are the heads and tails of the same coin. They are both facets of a common reality. In thus relating to each other they converge in the conceptual field of Modernity. The Enlightenment projected an anthropocentric world-view. In dispelling superstitions (on the one hand) and (with Kant) displacing knowledge of God beyond the scope of human experience, it produced what Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi in 1787 and Max Weber in 1919

called a ‘disenchanted world’ [*eine entzauberte Welt*]. Conversely the Counter-Enlightenment reaffirmed the irrational, spiritual, and religious dimensions of experience guided by, and complementing, authoritarian government. So, against Condorcet and Rousseau as inspiring the Revolution, de Maistre argues that it is corrupt and philosophy itself a force of disorganization, that the reason it relies on is a worthless abstraction. By contrast he makes sense of the Revolution by asserting against it the need for social order as conformity with the divine order evident in Nature. But he asserts also that violence is endemic in the cosmos, war a means regenerating humanity, and the blood it spills ‘a fertilizer for a plant called genius’ (de Maistre 1989b: 118ff., 120–1, 129, 133, 145, 171). But in proposing its dark ideology it could not help acknowledging the Enlightenment’s anthropocentric world-view: it had after all to refute it. (From the standpoint of Catholicism de Maistre rejects the philosophical ethos that produced the French Revolution, even if he regards its significance as a ‘great epoch’ (de Maistre 1989a: 65–6; 1989b: 112).) But this conflict produced a common situation. In Modernity there is no guarantee of a human world being naturally in itself meaningful. Its meaning depends on the fate of its self-knowledge and on the values it variously affirms or rejects. Both the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment recognize that a meaningful world depends on nothing but asserting its continued self-evaluation. Crucially they realize that, if this ever expired, human life would have no meaning in itself, and it would be meaningless because it would not be capable of creating any other values. The crucial adversary of the Enlightenment is, therefore, not the Counter-Enlightenment but nihilism. Nihilism is a common source of apprehension. As Nietzsche argues, the meanings human beings read into the world, the comprehensive structures by which they make sense of it, create nothing but ‘fictions’ symptomatic of the anthropic conceit that deludes human beings into posing as the measure of all things. Nihilism is this loss of a comprehensive meaning, – as in D’Holbach’s case. If someone tells him (he says) that God is pure spirit with no physical attributes and beyond nature, he would find himself ‘thrown back into nothingness’ [*me voilà replongé dans le néant*], his mind would be disorientated, ‘it would no longer have any idea’. Being expected to base his existence on what he recognizes as a metaphysical fiction offers a glimpse of the nihilism it signifies to him even though his materialism – a world-view to him far less fictional – ultimately dispels it (cf. Nietzsche 1996: 13ff.; D’Holbach 2008: 114–5; I; §10).

(b.) In this conflicted cognitive situation it is sophistical to infer from the Enlightenment that most generally believe ‘that it is possible to improve, through knowledge and science, the world in which we live’ (Pagden 2013: 343). The knowledge and (in this case: historical) science that formulate it show why this belief fails. They erroneously presuppose that the thought-style of the Enlightenment works with current science. Then a natural providence sustained the world. The world now – an ‘artificial world’ – has *already* been

made by knowledge and science (as e.g. Macaulay and Huxley are content to confirm). If this fabricated world does need improving, that is *already* the fault of the knowledge and science that made it. The technocratic knowledge meant to improve it must *already* have been radically faulty, cognitively inadequate.

The result is further types of nihilism. In *one*, abstract structures of comprehension (labelled ‘knowledge’ or ‘science’) are invoked to mask the actual effect of specialization, its redundant (because senseless) amplification of narrowly specialized technical expertise. In *the other*, the self-serving stress on objectivity, on detachment, or on impartiality negates the ‘humanistic coefficient’, the personal human interest and value driving the desire for objective knowledge by methods of ‘detached understanding’ (cf. Znaniecki 1980: 132).⁹

Specifically this technocratic knowledge suffers from misconception. If they project comprehensive systems, ‘knowledge’ and ‘science’ are still abstractions, convenient mental abbreviations for highly specialized, but not necessarily mutually compatible, cognitive procedures and disciplinary practices. Hence, a euphonic appeal to rational abstractions masks something quite different: technical specialization driven by its own self-serving logic. Further, in implying that knowledge and science have a diagnostic and curative potential, this ‘general belief’ denies them being already essential to, and complicit in, the fabric of social reality. Human beings might well live in a ‘wonderful’ world of ‘science-led social progress’: the conceptual contentment the idea of progress affords still endows science and engineering ‘with an inner and imperious momentum which must transform all human life systematically, a transformation to which human beings and human societies must simply adapt themselves, as if to a changing physical habitat’ (Allott 2002: 137). Far from improving the world for human existence, technological potential *per se* reconstructs it, represents it, in its own self-image. In fact (as Philip Allott further remarks), it inculcates ‘human passivity’ as the typical behavioural response to ‘the personal ambition, the imagination and ingenuity of scientists and engineers, fuelled by economic incentives, which now determine social development’. Further still, it produces ‘the relentless normativity of the actual’ with which ‘scientists and engineers oppress us’ (Allott 2002: 105). The construction and constant redevelopment of an artificial world, wherever it leads, imposes itself as normal, – as Allott argues (tending rather towards Hartmann’s view and refusing Macaulay’s and Huxley’s): ‘Humanity did not choose to work in systems of mass production, to travel over land and through the air at ever greater speeds, to fill the mind with images electronically generated on screens of various kinds, to prolong life and alter states of mind by the use of chemical compounds, to murder human beings by the million and destroy whole cities by the use of ever more ingenious weapons’ (ibid.). Hence far from enlightening the world, science and technology operate as the occlusive pre-emption of any existential-ethical alternative: ‘There is no way of knowing what another

human world might have been, a world made by human desire and the human spirit and not by human skill and the spirit of scientism' (ibid.).

From this it is clear that there can be no automatic human interest in 'knowledge' and 'science' presented as abstract intellectual ideals or sources of value. Basic differentiation is indispensable. To put it bluntly: the discovery of a treatment for an otherwise untreatable pulmonary condition would in human terms be positive, but to construct powerful weapons of chemical warfare would negate these terms' very basis. No wonder, as Brecht remarked, that scientific achievements might be met with public cries of horror. Scientific and human species-essential interests do not naturally coincide. The 'detached and scrupulous understanding', precisely because it is detached from everything except its self-serving interests, is nihilistic. It negates the human interest because it ignores the 'humanistic co-efficient', the subjectivity and situatedness of all human experience and the values that sustain it. This would include – as a corrective – the situation, in fact the 'psycho-cultural situation' of any agent who promotes knowledge as the product of intellectual detachment, who *does* accept 'the doctrine that his own active experience constitutes the main and most reliable source of knowledge about the data which he experiences' (cf. Znaniecki 1980: 132, 247–8). Rather the 'detached understanding' and the world it assembles is (in Nietzsche's terms) a fiction symptomatic of *a priori* nihilistic capacity. Phenomenologically speaking, the objective view is purely abstract. An object never appears in a 'pure' objective form. Rather it is discovered in a certain place at a certain time with a certain meaning expressing the intentions of the consciousness driving the enquiry. Conversely, the standpoint of 'detached' enquiry is impossible to locate, itself an abstraction. But suppose a 'detached and scrupulous understanding' could produce final scientific certainty, identity, or objectivity (cf. scrupulous): the human prospect would be horrific. There would be nothing more to know; 'detached understanding' would, therefore, negate itself. But, if unable to produce certainty, its 'scrupulous detachment' would lose all value. From both nihilistic perspectives there is no reason why it should automatically improve the world.

Further, the claim made for knowledge and science both masks the specialized expertise constituting them, and dodges the question whether or not the mind is adequate for technocratic governance. The self-amplification of specialized science produces such an abundance of ephemeral information and criticism 'that it becomes easier to rediscover a fact rather than to find out whether or not somebody else has already discovered and described it' (cf. Waddington 1977: 33). Thus the production of knowledge, intended as comprehensive, produces its own redundancy. Hardly improving the world, it contributes instead to its deterioration, – to the dreadful point where 'the progress of knowledge becomes intolerable [...] by its performance, the very power of its negativity' [*le Progrès des connaissances devient insupportable [...] par ses performances, la puissance même de sa négativité*] (Virilio 2005: 59).

Because of their normatizing function, knowledge and science vindicate themselves socially. Their comprehension anaesthetizes the apprehension that apart from them there is nothing else. They have produced a ‘disenchanted world’ [*eine entzauberte Welt*] based on all-purpose, any purpose, technical functionality and rational calculability (Weber 1988: 594, 612; cf. Jacobi 1976a: 52). In doing so, they have produced a world-order, an artificial human creation within Creation, that has disposed of God. Socially and psychologically, it is impossible to abandon the only other resource of meaning that claims to make sense of the world. As, echoing Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari observe: ‘Scientific knowledge as unbelief is really the last refuge of belief’ [*La connaissance scientifique comme incroyance est vraiment le dernier refuge de la croyance*] (Deleuze and Guattari 1972: 132).¹⁰

(c.) Fortified by nihilism the existential-ethical function of knowledge [*savoir-être*] returns to haunt the objectively detached, scientific stance that had negated and replaced it. For the Enlightenment nihilism is an immanent, vertiginous risk: the background of, and interstices between, the conflicting values and perspectives that animated it. Atheism it could admit. It resulted from a rationally reductive or materialistic version of its science of Man (e.g. Bayle, La Mettrie; D’Holbach). Enlightenment anthropocentrism could in any case leave God alone; it did not presume ‘His ways to scan’. It could reassure itself by affirming a common, metaphysically vindicated human identity created through a discourse structured on tautology, on essential sameness (cf. Davies 2016c: 230ff.).

The Enlightenment is haunted by two conceptions of nihilism, two types of experiential disenchantment, in a disenchanted world. These are implicit both in its scientific ethos of rational calculability and in the idealist concept (as in Fichte’s philosophy) of the ‘absolute ego’, the foundational principle of reality within human consciousness itself. These derive from affirming the therapeutic influence of an anthropocentric culture and from subverting intellectual arrogance.

The Enlightenment has been often censured for reducing the world to a rational, mechanical system, for thereby impoverishing human experience, – a failure only Romanticism could subsequently correct by re-affirming the emotive, irrational, and oneiric elements of reality. But as (e.g.) Pierre Bayle’s *Pensées diverses sur la comète* [*Diverse Thoughts on the Comet*] (1682/1727) and Hume’s ‘Essay on Miracles’ demonstrate, its intention was to dispel the credibility of superstition, miracles, portents, and religious fanaticism. It thus aimed also to counteract the naïve credulity that sustained them and to liberate human beings from the apprehension they induced; – proof, if any were needed, that it is not marginalizing would-be Romantic values. So both Bayle and Hume affirm disbelief as an indispensable, determining aspect of social behaviour. (In particular in dissociating alleged signs of divinity from natural phenomena obeying natural laws and social behaviour regulated by civil law, Bayle argues – *inter alia* – for the feasibility of a society based on atheism, on no belief at all (Bayle 2007: 359, 362; §§172, 174).) Both base

their arguments against this surfeit of credulity on what Hume calls ‘the rules of just reasoning’ (Hume 1971: 519). In narrowing the scope of human experience, this anthropocentric shift betrays a certain ‘nihilistic reductionism’: Bayle employing common-sense, exposing logical and factual inconsistencies, thus subverting prejudices; Hume sceptically evaluating factual evidence and witness-statements, relying instead on experience, empirical data, and the laws of nature.

Post-Kantian idealism as exemplified by Fichte (but with echoes of Spinoza, Berkeley) also offers ‘nihilistic reductionism’, but in a contrary direction. Where Bayle and Hume narrowed the scope of human consciousness to disconnect its credulity from supernatural reality, idealism amplifies it to make supernaturalism redundant. In claiming to be able to create the world, reality, the human mind displaces divine creation. Once susceptible to cognitive inadequacy, it now constitutes the cornerstone of reality.

The result is a further aspect of nihilism, – apprehension arising from a sense of the groundlessness of human existence, and from the lack of credibility in any language that might attempt to make sense of it, except, perhaps, in a dream. It is *as though* human existence and the whole artificial world, the humanized nature, it has fabricated for itself were suspended precariously over a dark, endless void. For Jacobi idealism was nihilism (Jacobi 1976b: 44). As he remarks in *Jacobi an Fichte* (1799) Kant and Fichte, like Huyghens and Newton, their counterparts in physics and astronomy, had discovered ‘the higher mechanics of the human mind’ [*die höhere Mechanik des menschlichen Geistes*] (Jacobi 1976b: 31). (Fichte particularly projected the world as an epiphenomenon of the absolute ego, for Jacobi an all too artificial world-artifice.) As Jacobi had already argued in *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch* [*David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism. A Dialogue*] (1787), the search for the truth of perceptions of the objective, material world lost sight of it, which left only subjectivity, which leads to idealism. Similarly, the search for the truth of human perceptions of the immaterial world, of the substantial involvement of the human mind in vindicating scientifically the presence of personal, veritable providence, lost sight of that too. This left idealist philosophers ‘with merely logical phantasms’, which meant ‘they found only nihilism’ [*es blieben ihnen blos logische Phantasmen: sie fanden – den Nihilismus*] (Jacobi 1976a: 108). For Jacobi there is only the choice between nothingness or God. For a human being (especially e.g. a pantheist such as Spinoza or an idealist philosopher such as Fichte) to claim for humanity, let alone for himself or herself, the miraculous, creative power of God is already nihilism (Jacobi 1976b: 49). Hence, his rejection of contemporary science. The sublime beauty of the heavens no longer overwhelms the ‘specialist of the mechanics’ [*Kenner der Mechanik*] that keeps these heavenly bodies moving and even formed them. He is amazed no longer by this infinite object, but solely by the human understanding which in Copernicus, Gassendi, Kepler, Newton, and Laplace ‘could raise itself above this object, banish wonder by science, remove gods from their heaven, and disenchant the cosmos’ [*durch Wissenschaft dem Wunder ein Ende zu*

machen, den Himmel seiner Götter zu berauben, des Weltall zu entzaubern vermochte] (Jacobi 1976a: 52).

(d.) So nihilism is latent in the Enlightenment, particularly in its thought-style and discourse predicated on mechanism. It is evinced (e.g.) in two texts: one – materialistic – in the work of de Sade (1740–1814); the other – idealistic (or spiritualistic) – in the work of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825). They both identify a moral void implicit in an advanced, modern civilization.

Here (besides the affirmation of atheism) it is not so much the pleasure in inflicting pain that is nihilistic, but its philosophical justification itself already placed beyond good and evil. This takes fundamentally positive Enlightenment concepts – in particular nature, the most comprehensive, the most normative – and refunctions them as their negation. The sense of a progressive civilization, already re-styled after Rousseau as a decline from the state of nature, affirms cruelty as a still pure, vital energy, hence as a virtue not a vice (Sade 1972: 124). As a form of social anthropology, history discloses no emergence of ennobling human qualities (such as Herder's concept of humanity [*Humanität*]) but a panorama of examples of culturally affirmed and affirming sexual violence (cf. Sade 1972: 128, 224ff.). Metaphysically speaking, there is an element of Leibniz's best of all possible worlds, sustained by pre-established harmony, in de Sade's assertion that 'nature needs now virtue, now vice to maintain perfectly the laws that keep it balanced'. Nature 'inspires in individuals whatever movement it needs' at any given moment, so that 'no evil is committed when they give themselves over to them, whatever sort they may be supposed to be' (Sade 1972: 301). So that in describing nature itself as a 'motor', 'the only motor at work in the universe' [*un seul moteur agit dans l'univers*], or generation as material mechanism, de Sade activates a semantic resource that encodes the organic or the biological in terms of material artifice, thereby permitting drift in a conceptual field that elides it with Leibniz's 'world machine' [*machine du monde*] artfully invented by God, Jacobi's 'mechanics of the human mind' [*die Mechanik des menschlichen Geistes*], but also with Carlyle's culture of Mechanism and Huxley's 'logic engine' (Sade 1972: 116, 301; cf. Leibniz 1969b: 94). In fact, the tableaux formed by inter-locking, naked human bodies for the sake of gratification and punishment represent them as ingenious assemblages of interchangeable components of adaptable sexual machines.

But de Sade's affirmation of sexual violence shows nihilism as implicit in Enlightenment thinking even then less through its re-evaluation of all Enlightenment values, than through demonstrating that Enlightenment concepts integral to human science are so adaptable (or so promiscuous?) to start with. 'Nature' is such a comprehensive concept: there is hardly anything it would exclude or not determine. Thus the relationship between language and concepts (on the one hand) and any given human situation (on the other) appears arbitrary. It is unclear what concepts, what grammar, what semiotic structures, determine this situation, but it is clear that, for all kinds of cognitive purposes, concepts, grammars, and semiotic structures do determine it, – if only provisionally, inadequately.

A more dramatic description of the nihilistic potential of Enlightenment anthropocentrism, particularly of human autonomy predicated on Kantian and post-Kantian idealism, is offered by Richter in a short narrative essay in gothic horror, ‘Rede des toten Christus vom Weltgebäude herab, dass kein Gott sei’ [*Sermon of the Dead Christ from the World-Pulpit That There Is no God*] (1789) in his novel *Blumen-, Frucht-, und Dornenstücke oder Ehestand, Tod, und Hochzeit des Armenadvokaten F. St. Siebenkäs* [*Flower, Fruit and Thorn-Pieces or the Marriage, Death and Wedding of the Pauper’s Advocate F. St. Siebenkäs*] (1796–1797/1818). The essay repudiates atheism whose hand (it says) is ‘exploding and pulverizing the entire mental universe into innumerable quicksilver points of egos’ [*das ganze geistige Universum wird durch die Hand des Atheismus zersprengt und zerschlagen in zahlenlose quecksilberne Punkte von Ichs*] moving confused hither and thither in their disorientation (Richter 1971: 270). The nihilistic vision of a godless world is presented as the narrator’s dream resulting from a childhood fear of the dead arising from their graves at midnight for a church-service of their own. The dream both evokes a nihilistic vision and cancels it as being only a dream, nothing real. But the narrator’s awakening afterwards to the familiar world on a peaceful summer evening, though a source of joy and relief, does not quite dispel apprehension, that particular ‘uncertainty that comes from dreams’ (cf. Caillois 1956: 86ff.). In the dream Christ relates that he has explored the entire universe only to discover that there is no God, that he searched for the eye of God and found only its vacant eye-sockets. He concludes that, having lost their father, everyone, himself included, is an orphan (Richter 1971: 273). Christ, therefore, realizes that those who still believe in God and an after-life are deluding themselves (Richter 1971: 275). But worse than the loss of a universe that evinces a divinely ordained structure, worse than the ‘nothingness and the infinite emptiness’ [*das Nichts [...] und die leere Unermeßlichkeit*] that replaces it, is the degradation of existence implied by Kantian and post-Kantian idealism, the cornerstone of a comprehensive human science, but also the source of this atheism, this nihilism. In particular, as Richter formulates it, it reveals the risks the Enlightenment incurred in attempting to construct a science of Man: ‘Ah, if every ego is its own father and creator, why can it not be also its own Angel of Death?’ [*Ach, wenn jedes Ich sein eigener Vater und Schöpfer ist, warum kann es nicht auch sein eigener Würgengel sein?*] (Richter 1971: 274).

(e.) Thus the Enlightenment exposes a problem immanent in modern cognitive and axiological practice. It demonstrates human beings defeating nature and, through mental effort – ‘detached understanding’ – creating an artificial, technocratic world. However, the scientific knowledge of nature it requires finally eliminates existential-ethical value and meaning. Since this is the fate of modern knowledge, the Enlightenment cannot be other than dissident in thought and practice. It thus reasserts the hitherto eradicated, existential-ethical dimension of knowledge. To this end it reaffirms the cognitive centrality of the ‘human co-efficient’ as that principle in which the apprehension of nihilism

and the question of the sufficiency or the adequacy of human reason converge. In disrupting cognitive complacency and sedentary values dissidence might well appear nihilistic. Without cognitive consensus life appears empty, lacking any basis. No wonder there is the persistent quest to define what the Enlightenment was and why it ‘still’ matters. Nevertheless cognitive consensus promotes cultural contentment, an antidote to critical enquiry and evaluation. So in disrupting academic orthodoxy and disciplinary habit Enlightenment dissidence, in confronting nihilism, also reaffirms and renews the quest for meaning and value. It negates reason that turns passive and what thereby accompanies it, its susceptibility to superstition and prejudice, its ideological susceptibility [*Verführbarkeit*] (Blumenberg 1973: 247). In contrast to technocratic-academic convention with its ‘detached understanding’ disclosing ‘what it is to be human’, dissidence is motivated by its material situation, by the situated character of knowledge – situations in which it itself is embroiled.

The cognitive situation defined by nihilistic dissidence or dissident nihilism sustains Enlightenment thinking. Think of the conceptual field of Enlightenment philosophy construed chronologically comprising, e.g. the precursors and successors of both Descartes and Fichte. What even the Enlightenment described as progress was nothing other than a succession of faulty paradigms and dubious thought-styles, a sequence of ‘fictions’, themselves – according to Nietzsche – symptomatic of nihilism. So the very notion that the Enlightenment proposed that the world could be ‘improved through knowledge and science’, thereby revealing ‘what it is to be human’, in fact expresses technocracy compensating for its nihilism by adopting a superior standpoint: a self-deluding, comprehensive administrative gaze. The Enlightenment, by contrast, never realized itself as the apotheosis of the same old thing (as emerges from its academic description); rather it was – and still is – a persistent reservation towards the world as it has become.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion of Mannheim’s concept of the historical ‘documentary value’ of culture, see Davies 2016a: 97–8.
- 2 ‘Utopia’ means ‘no place’; ‘eutopia’ means ‘good place’ (i.e. not the sophistical ‘better’).
- 3 Where the social behaviour requisite for the discipline of history is concerned, see the discussion of ‘comprehension and history’ in Davies 2006: 77–91, ‘history-focussed behaviour’ in Davies 2010: 15–34, and ‘history: working the way the world works’ and ‘what does history do?’ in Davies 2016a: 3–18.
- 4 On the significance of *semblable* – ‘loaded with both uncompromising ethical propriety and absolute cognitive validity’ – in Enlightenment discourse, see Davies 2016c: 232ff.
- 5 See also the discussion of John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (1853/1858) and Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (2012) in Davies 2016a: 121–32.
- 6 This solipsistic self-implication in the narrative is a characteristic of Enlightenment historiography. In other words: historians of the Enlightenment are actually writing the history of themselves. The historian as an ‘educated person’ invokes for the sake of amplification the whole class of ‘educated people’ to which he or she naturally belongs and with which he or she identifies. The reader, though, is not told what defines the

sociological class of ‘educated’ people. (What would differentiate them from, e.g., those who were, say, ‘naturally intelligent’?) Further examples of this historiographical self-study can be found in Margaret C. Jacob, *The Secular Enlightenment* (2019): 1, 34, 43, 66, 85, 102, 125, 163, 218, 234, 265.

- 7 For a further, variant exposition of this issue, see Davies 2006: 126–9.
- 8 cf. the advert for the Samsung Galaxy S7 and S7 Edge: www.tvadmusic.co.uk/tag/samsung/ (accessed 01.03.2016).
- 9 The term ‘humanistic co-efficient’ comes from Florian Znaniecki: ‘In contrast with the natural scientist, who seeks to discover an order among empirical data entirely independent of conscious human agents, the student of culture seeks to discover any order among empirical data which depends upon, is produced, and is maintained by them. To perform this task he takes every empirical datum which he investigates with what we have called its *humanistic coefficient*, i.e., as it appears to those human individuals who experience it and use it.’ One of the key implications of this stance is that ‘in applying the humanistic coefficient, an inductive student of culture does not accept the doctrine that his own active experience constitutes the main and most reliable source of knowledge about the data which he experiences’ (Znaniecki 1980: 132). Strangely enough Znaniecki assimilates this position to history, and not just to sociology or social psychology (cf. Znaniecki 1980: 147, 249): the historicist core of academic history invokes ‘processes’ and ‘forces’ transcending the immediate experience and independent of the life-world of those involved in them. Znaniecki’s automatic recourse to history for exploring the consciousness of cultural agents is not logically justifiable. Rather it shows that the compulsion to historicize itself needs to be analysed from the standpoint of the humanistic co-efficient.
- 10 To contextualize the quotation from Deleuze and Guattari, see Nietzsche’s reflections on the value of science as sustained by residual belief in God in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), III; §§23ff. (Nietzsche 1988c: 395ff.).

2 The Enlightenment and the fate of history

1. The sophism of historical continuity

(a.) For insisting on reason, empirical fact, experimentation, calculation, logical systems, immutable natural laws to guarantee mental adequacy, the Enlightenment attracts devastating criticism. Far from being generated by an impersonal, disenchanting world-machine, reality (this criticism insists) is also woven from personal emotions, imagination, fantasy indispensable for individual freedom, nothing any logical mechanism could produce. There is Thomas Carlyle in 1840 emphatically ‘declaring the world to be no machine’ and asserting ‘that it does *not* go by wheel-and-pinion “motives,” self-interests, checks and balances; that there is something far other in it than the clank of spinning-jennies and parliamentary majorities; and, on the whole, that it is not a machine at all!’ (Carlyle n.d.a: 393); or Isaiah Berlin in 1973 asserting liberalism based on value pluralism. He confirms his view *inter alia* with Herder’s reservations towards the Enlightenment’s scientific universalism, specifically with his ‘attack upon what is regarded as the false mechanical model of mankind used by scientifically minded French *philosophes* [...], who understand only machine-like, causal factors, or the arbitrary will of individual kings and legislators and commanders [...]’ (Berlin 1979a: 12). This criticism credits the Enlightenment with advocating the automatic precedence of ‘objective’ over ‘subjective’ knowledge. It also deprecates its rational regulation of an otherwise liberal society by dictatorial socio-historical ‘laws’.

In fact, this criticism betrays a syndrome of current cognitive practice. It conjoins personal (subjective) freedom with (objective) cognitive constraint. But cognitive practice affects social behaviour. It would induce internal conflict if conceptual contentment did not offer compensation. It coordinates personal social conformity with objective cognitive convention. History-focussed behaviour – in Berlin’s case focussed on the history of ideas – is its common form (cf. Davies 2010: 15–34). By contrast, the Enlightenment ethos presumed social conformity offset by personal cognitive freedom. This also produces internal conflict. Its advocates courted personal risk whenever their cognitive freedom implied social non-conformity. Frederick the Great’s injunction as alleged by Kant is one illustration: ‘reason as much

as you like about whatever you like, just see you obey' (Kant 1982b: 61); another is Spinoza's precarious existence that sustained a subversive philosophy; and another still: Voltaire beaten up, in February 1726, by thugs in the service of the Chevalier de Rohan, – an incident Montesquieu deplores (cf. Montesquieu 1951: 1431–2).

History-focussed behaviour is symptomatic of the academic character-structure. It combines the conformist behaviour the history discipline requires with the cognitive conventions defining its technical expertise. It projects both its authoritative superiority and its repressive complacency. It makes its managerial stance acceptable. Crucially, it affirms a pre-emptive historical judgement: it *must* presuppose historical continuity. This *a priori* relates past and present through transference (to use the psychoanalytical term). Current cognitive concerns of the academic character-structure are projected onto the past; the imagined (reconstructed) character-structure of the past with its concerns are projected onto the present, onto the academic circumstances now producing its history. Thus Modernity recognizes itself in the Enlightenment: eighteenth-century still ramifying into twenty-first-century reality. With 'century' as a categorical coordinator presuming an essential historical-cultural property or documentary value, historical difference merges with cultural identity.

Current historical self-understanding, therefore, renders the Enlightenment both indispensable and inadequate. Apparently 'the radical Enlightenment is one of the most important keys for understanding the *origins* and intellectual *roots* as well as the *contradictions* of Modernity in the Western countries'. But to define it precisely by using the terminology of the various human sciences means 'historians contending with the *process* of marginalization, crude generalizations, and denigration of their object of study that *reaches back* to the *time* of the Enlightenment itself' (Israel and Mulsow 2014: 8 (my emphasis on categorical coordinators)). Historical understanding thus identifies inconsistency. On the one hand, Enlightenment represents a 'legacy' of humane moral ideals and emancipatory political values; on the other (for example), it hardly recognizes those – victims of ethnic or gender discrimination – most needing them. Consequently, the foundation of its moral and rational universalism seems faulty, the historical conclusion inevitable. The historicized Enlightenment proves to be a 'false friend', incapable of producing 'the world we want' and it appeared to promise (cf. Pěcar and Tricoire 2015; Loudon 2010). But historicism ordinarily relativizes all values. So the historicist assessment of the Enlightenment devalues its values. Boosting its historical significance stresses its axiological failings.

This conclusion typifies the sophism of historical continuity history-focussed behaviour as a form of transference projects. A given 'epoch' – here the Enlightenment – assumes its place in a sequence of 'causes' driving a 'process'. The categorical coordinators ('epoch', 'cause', 'process') constructing this continuity transfer onto it the explicable sense the historian aims to discover in his or her historical account. The documented identity of the 'epoch' (i.e. Enlightenment) lends it the substantive coherence defining its cognitive

value. However, though proposed for its veracity, historical continuity curtails cultural reflection. It pre-empts appreciation of the Enlightenment's cognitive situation. It disregards its most significant modern characteristics, those this essay explores: its synchronous asynchronicity, the disintegration of the very concept of value, philosophical problems as conceptual experimentation, historicism as the synthesis of temporal dimensions, and Modernity as its self-destruction.

(b.) That 'not everyone is there in the same now' [*Nicht alle sind im selben Jetzt da*], the synchronous occurrence of asynchronous socio-economic situations, social attitudes, cultural values, and cognitive judgements (i.e. *die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*): this is the immediate aspect of the modern world encountered in ordinary experience (cf. Bloch 1977: 104ff.). The historical 'age' is inconsistent, heterogeneous. Suppose a 'historical process' existed, none of its components would 'process' at the same pace. Historicism pre-empts this cognitive situation. Historians register it deprecatingly in terms of internal *contradictions* or *controversies* vitiating or motivating the Enlightenment. They see it as a 'peculiar mix of coherence and dissonance' (Israel 2013: 32).

And yet asynchronicity is inherent in Enlightenment culture, even in its own naïve historicism. Encounters with different cultures, be they fictional or real, indicated different time dimensions, even if intelligible only once assimilated to a historically transcendental metaphysical plan for the human species such as Herder's concept of Humanity [*Humanität*]. In any case, asynchronicity is inherent in ordinary experience. In his *Considérations sur les mœurs de ce siècle* [*Reflections on the Manners of This Century*] (1751) Charles Duclos remarks that 'those who live a hundred leagues away from the French capital are a century away from it in their manner of thinking and acting' [*Ceux qui vivent à cent lieues de la Capitale, en sont à un siècle pour les façons de penser & d'agir*] (Duclos 2005: 101). It confirms Peter Gay's assertion that 'the new style of thought was reserved to the well-born, the articulate, and the lucky: the rural and the urban masses had little share in the new dispensation'. It justifies his conclusion that 'as in ideas, so in styles of life, Western societies existed in several centuries at once' (Gay 1979: 4). But, ironically, precisely in a chapter entitled 'Prelude to Modernity', Gay embeds his argument in the discourse of progress, of an historicist project. He blocks any sense that asynchronicity is much more indicative of Modernity – especially since the deterritorialization of the intellectual is one of its basic characteristics. The recourse to exile or at least a safe refuge to write or think was a common experience, even a vocational condition, not just for many Enlightenment *philosophes* in particular but for modern intellectuals in general. Typical is the case of Madame de Staël. As a dissident figure under the Napoleonic regime suffering also from French 'culture fatigue', she experienced going into exile in Germany in 1803 as a shift in time and space, a transfer to a new time dimension: '[E]xistence seems uprooted, you become a stranger to yourself', she writes, 'you meet no-one who can talk to you about days gone by, no-one who can testify for you to the identity of days past with the days present' (Staël 1968: I: 115).

But one of the best appreciations of the asynchronous character of historical synchronization in the modern era, in the ‘present age’, comes ironically from Fichte’s rigorous historicism, derived from an idealist philosophy that represents (arguably) the apotheosis of both post-Kantian reason and Spinoza’s ethics, – that, therefore, has impeccable Enlightenment credentials. His *Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* [*Basic Features of the Present Age*] (1806) proposes an epistemically validated ‘world-plan’ [*Weltplan*] for the human species unfolding through five historical phases. The first corresponds largely to Antiquity and evinces the ‘instinctive’ use of reason; the second to the Mediaeval world where this instinct is transformed into a ‘commanding authority’ in church and state; the fourth, in the future, envisages that reason and its concepts will be grasped ‘by clear consciousness’; in the fifth, in a far more remote future, all aspects of the human species will be judged and ordered by the laws of reason: in it personal consciousness, the self-realization of the species, the undisputed prevalence of reason, and the revelation of the divine order of things will converge (Fichte 1971b: 17, 252–3). The third phase, from the Renaissance and the Reformation onward, is the present age, the age under review: a problematic age, the lynchpin of Fichte’s comprehensive historicist design, an age of desolation [*Leerheit*], validating only what it already epistemologically grasps [*begreifen*], that seems unlikely yet to be superseded (Fichte 1971b: 71, 79). However, as a philosopher vindicating his historicist scheme through science [*Wissenschaft*] predicated on a rational-logical idea, Fichte argues that he refers to history only to clarify philosophy’s own higher, scientific-rational purposes. The historian, as an ‘annalist’ dealing in facts and evidence, has, apart from the succession of years, no fixed points of cognitive orientation. It takes the philosopher to make him aware of the ‘most multifarious elements against, and intermingling with, each other’ [*die mannigfaltigsten Stoffe neben- und durcheinander*] in these five epochs, – to show how each synchronizes the most asynchronous phenomena: ‘remnants [*Überbleibsel*] of the original brutishness; remnants of the original culture not yet diluted ready for dissemination; remnants or intimations of all four stages of cultivation; finally progressive and self-mobilizing acculturation [*Cultivierung*] itself’ (Fichte 1971b: 140). Here, in contrast to current academic, sophisticated historicism, Fichte’s naïve historicist programme acknowledges that heterogeneous features remain asynchronous, albeit within a transcendental logical structure.

Asynchronicity, then, is not about someone being ‘ahead of’ or ‘behind’ ‘the times’. It queries why the ‘age’ or ‘the times’ – or specifically ‘the time of the Enlightenment’ – are deemed to offer a normative identity. Except for historicism, the definition of the ‘age’ or the ‘times’ is arbitrary. It signifies the conventional selection of recurrent similar ‘documentary’ features elicited from any passage of years to ensure *a priori* the stability and coherence of the pre-supposed historical object under discussion (cf. Davies 2016a: 96–9). A counter-argument might find the pace of scientific development in the Enlightenment irrelevant: whatever their developmental stage the sciences all testify to the same thing, the same historically documented, comprehensive ‘period’. This is itself a circular, redundant response, the product

of a comprehensively integrated structure of cultural reality reinforced by categorical coordinators. Its sophisticated pre-emption and cognitive constriction rely on an unwarranted inference or perhaps just on cognitive habit or presumption: that if the Enlightenment is – historically speaking – the ‘latest thing’, the harbinger of Modernity, its constituent elements must be it as well. ‘Enlightenment’ is nothing but the totality of its documented constituent elements. So naturally Enlightenment thinking repudiating religious prejudices [*préjugés*] while affirming conventional ethnic and gender preconceptions appears hypocritical. Now the ‘unwarranted inference’ works in reverse: any morally or cognitively dubious component of the comprehensive structure must radically compromise Enlightenment comprehension as a whole. This sophism results in Enlightenment historiography quarrelling over methods of approach. It projects the Enlightenment itself as an antique, multi-faceted *objet d’art*, the preserve of self-regarding scholastic connoisseurship.

(c.) Historicist pre-emption also ignores a symptom accompanying the asynchronous character of Modernity: the atomization of spheres of cultural value [*Atomisierung der Wertgebiete*] and with that the ‘disintegration of all values’ [*Zerfall der Werte*] (cf. Broch 1978: 498, 536). This cardinal predicament is explored in Hermann Broch’s cultural diagnosis of German society between 1888 and 1918 in his philosophical novel trilogy *Die Schlafwandler* [*The Sleepwalkers*] (1931/1932). Values such as ‘the Platonic structure of Medieval theocracy’, it asserts, are an irrational attempt to carve meaning out of the irrationality and vulnerability of the human situation (Broch 1978: 536). But in Broch’s historicist perspective this ecclesiastical form falls apart, undermined by the worldly reorientation of the mind in the Renaissance and the Reformation but also subsequently by the authority of science (Broch 1978: 538). The resulting fragmentation [*Zersplitterung*] of values derives from the rational autonomy science requires. This autonomy of reason is ‘radical evil’ [*die autonom gewordene Vernunft ist das radikal Böse*] (Broch 1978: 691). As with Descartes, the self-reflective individual (not a theocratic structure) is the source of values; as after Kant, individual autonomy produces heterogeneous values rationally justified by their multifarious cultural spheres. The result is a chaotic ‘conflict of spheres of value’ [*Widerstreit von Wertgebieten*] – economic, artistic, military, scientific, etc. – competing rapaciously for absolute validity, for cognitive superiority, for social dominance. Certainly the historicist account of the origins of this situation is secondary: the culture of conflicting heterogeneous spheres of values is self-evident; no past precedent can anticipate its future implications. With the logic of culture irrelevant for his or her existential situation, the individual confronting ‘the horror of the infinite’ [*das Grauen des Unendlichen*] is left isolated and apprehensive, clinging to whatever routine identity this brittle cultural logic dispenses (Broch 1978: 498).

The Enlightenment may well be the ‘source’ of Modernity, but not because it *anticipates* present-day cultural values: a heterogeneous field of values competing with each other for dominance. Rather, this situation *is already* a determining feature of Enlightenment culture. In particular, the dissident concept of

eclecticism as formulated by Diderot would be unfeasible without it. It means forming ‘a solid comprehensive argument [*un tout solide*], resulting from his own work, from a *great number of parts* that he has gathered together and which belong to others’ (Diderot 1994b: 302 (my emphasis)). Heterogeneity presupposes more than, say, Gay asserts in describing eclecticism as ‘the philosophical method consequent on relativism’, on ‘the recognition that no single set of convictions has absolute validity’, therefore requiring ‘discriminating selection between systems’, since ‘no system has the whole truth and most systems have some truth’ (Gay 1995: 163). Heterogeneity means that the concept of truth, ‘be it ‘some truth’ or ‘the whole truth’, has shattered.

In the historiography, however (as Gay reveals), heterogeneity goes unrecognized. To gauge the significance of seventeenth-century scientific discoveries he cites famous lines from John Donne’s commemorative poem, *The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World* (1611):

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
[...]
And freely men confess that this world’s spent,
When in the planets and the firmament
They seek so many new; they see that this
Is *crumbled out* again to his *atomies*.
’Tis *all in pieces*, all *coherence gone*.
(my italics)

(Donne 2013: 835–8, ll.205–213; cf. Gay 1995: 314; Pagden 2013: 32)

Gay dismisses this as the ‘*exceptional* response of an exceptional man, speaking for a small and *dwindling* group of *select* spirits’; he asserts by contrast that ‘for the *most part*, the seventeenth-century imagination exuberantly *expanded* with each new discovery’ (Gay 1995: 314–15 (my italics)). Here a historical evaluation derived from source materials – i.e. *exceptional/dwindling* yielding to *the most part/expanded* – predetermines the alleged historical situation. However, far from being exceptional, Donne’s insight that the firmament ‘Is *crumbled out* again to his *atomies*./’Tis *all in pieces*, all *coherence gone*’ illustrates perfectly Broch’s theory of the (post-Mediaeval) collapse in values and their resulting heterogeneous atomization. It also extends Modernity’s conceptual field. Donne’s apprehension is not foreign to its counterpart now: ‘Man’, the cornerstone of all meaning, ‘the proper study of mankind’, fearful of his own, unique cosmological vulnerability, reduced to searching even the most distant planets for a sign of life, for even the most minute, microbial life-form, just to avoid feeling isolated and vulnerable in the immeasurable cosmos.

(d.) With any moment in history locked onto the ideas held by ‘the most part’, the historicist stance misses the point. The heterogeneous character of Modernity is defined not by its most influential ideas, but by all kinds of ideas in their simple co-existence. Instead, it is presented as *contradictions* within the

Enlightenment itself, as often bitter *controversies* between its proponents, implying that these expose within its general movement compromising structural flaws. But, in the case of the Enlightenment, conventional intellectual history as the history of the relationships between intellectuals works only because of pre-existing cultural heterogeneity. It manifests itself in several universal forms and their combinations as much as in diagnostic attempts to come to terms with it:

α. There is the variety of religious belief (or disbelief) such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, Protestantism, Presbyterianism, Quakerism, Pietism, Methodism, Socinianism, Antitrinitarianism, deism, natural theology, and atheism. This raises the fraught issue of religious toleration. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) Locke acknowledges the prevailing diversity of religious belief. He realizes that it endangers social cohesion. He, therefore, pleads for the individual's liberty of conscience and for religious belief as his or her private concern. The heterogeneity of religious values persists, albeit in theory 'domesticated' by a legal framework. In his *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) Voltaire visiting the London Stock Exchange recognizes that capitalism, encoded here as humanitarian because cosmopolitan, sustains religious diversity. The very heterogeneity of religious values promotes peace and happiness.

β. There is the diversity of art-forms, acknowledged by Gay: 'Neoclassicism, rococo, naturalism, indifference to, and even, with Rousseau, a certain Spartan suspicion of, the arts, were all possible aesthetic positions for philosophes to adopt, and were all compatible with the philosophy of the Enlightenment' (Gay 1979: 217). There is also the heterogeneity of aesthetic taste, hence of the appreciation of beauty. According to Alexander Gerard, good taste implies a sound or discriminating judgement and the ability to appreciate the objective beauty of a painting or a poem, and a fine moral sense (cf. Gerard 1759: 116). Whereas for Montesquieu, taste, a faculty as varied as human experience itself, motivates cognition, thus enhancing the soul's love of truth, it having been made for knowing and seeing (Montesquieu 1951: 1246). The attempt to recommend a 'standard of taste' both discriminating and virtuous is a means of configuring sense in otherwise heterogeneous and unregulated terrain, as Hume recognizes: 'The great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under every one's observation'. Moreover (he adds), 'those who can enlarge their view to contemplate distant nations and remote ages, are still surprised at the great inconsistency and contrariety'. Hence his inference that, with the great diversity of human experience, human judgement must be correspondingly diverse and its diversity never underestimated: 'As this variety of taste is obvious to the most careless inquirer, so will it be found, on examination, to be still greater in reality than in appearance' (Hume 1971: 231).

γ. Inherent in the varieties of religious belief and the diversity of taste is the apprehension that the heterogeneity of sense and values could render the human world senseless through a surfeit of values. Accounting for religious belief within the limited scope of the human mind, assimilating the cultivation

of taste to the historically determined moral progress of humanity: these disclose the apprehension that, without any rational-historical order sustaining it, reality would be nothing but confusion, the intimation of a fundamental nihilism.

This situation makes Kant's and Fichte's concepts of history significant. Unable to tolerate the heterogeneity of co-existent world-views and values symptomatic of Modernity, they counteract it by imposing on it an imperative historicist design.

Kant attributes to history a cosmopolitan purpose that would transform human beings into 'citizens of the world'. But humanity is not yet 'moralized' [*moralisiert*]. (It lacks knowledge of how to be (cf. *savoir-être*).) Its absence of purpose, the 'rule of blind chance' [*Regierung des blinden Ungefährs*] or 'anarchic freedom', in fact the endemic 'unsocial sociability' of human beings, are all symptomatic of the heterogeneity of sense and values. The situation permits an intimation of nihilism: '[F]rom inevitably conflicted human behaviour on the whole would come *nothing*, at least *nothing wise*' [*daß [...] im großen überall nichts, wenigstens nichts Kluges herauskomme*] (Kant 1982a: 43–4 (my emphasis)). Even so (Kant asserts) at least 'a seed of Enlightenment' [*ein Keim der Aufklärung*] might survive to promote humanity's self-improvement. The ideal goal of a truly cosmopolitan society would assist future generations in making sense of an otherwise increasing burden of empirical (hence heterogeneous) historical erudition. So comprehensive an idea is reassuring. It offers 'a guide for representing, at least on the whole, as **a system** what would otherwise be an *aimless aggregate* of human actions' (Kant 1982a: 48–50 (my emphasis/italics)).

By contrast Fichte argues that epistemological principles meant to promote Enlightenment, themselves produce heterogeneous, atomized spheres of fact and value. This is a basic feature of the present (third) age – the modern age – 'the age of the absolute indifference towards all truth, completely unfettered, lacking any guiding thread: *the state of complete sinfulness*' (Fichte 1971b: 11–12 (emphasis in original)).¹ This age is scientific [*wissenschaftlich*]. It is based not on a fundamental comprehensive idea [*Idee*] but on concepts, which accounts for its vacuousness [*Leerheit*]. Fixated on concepts [*Begriff*], the present age validates only what they can grasp [*begreifen*]: 'empirical experience adequately described' [*der Begriff der sinnlichen Erfahrung, satksam beschrieben*]. It results in 'unadorned naked concepts of experience' and a deeply disappointing 'vacuous formal knowledge' (Fichte 1971b: 111–12).

Fichte thus rejects Locke's empiricism as 'the worst philosophical system of all' (Fichte 1971b: 103). He also censures the cornerstone of Enlightenment thinking: Kant's injunction 'to think for oneself' [*Selbstdenken*]. He values the social dissemination of 'formal knowledge', of understanding something for oneself [*das eigene Begreifen*] (Fichte 1971b: 80). Nevertheless, it results only in heterogeneity – a 'wealth of materials of opinion' both unoriginal and inconclusive, yet constantly expanding. In the individual this capacity to conceptualize generates a 'certain complacency' [*eine gewisse Selbstgefälligkeit*] while acknowledging the attendant diversity of opinion. Only a truly epistemological

way of thinking [*eine wahrhaft wissenschaftliche Denkart*] (exemplified by Fichte's theory of knowledge) would recognize 'the arrogance required for believing that our personal opinion meant anything, that someone would want to know how such important people as we are see things'. No one (Fichte insists) should open their mouth unless they are sure what they have to say comes not from them but from pure reason (Fichte 1971b: 81).

The present age – Modernity – is defined by its relentless search for novelty. *Neuzeit* is dependent on perpetual innovation. It finds an ever-increasing sphere of heterogeneous opinion intellectually frustrating, but it cannot commit to the life-long intellectual effort and moral commitment Fichte's thinking demands. In response it overturns the 'dry desolation' and 'fearsome emptiness' of its conceptual principles. It thus rejects its tendency to comprehend everything. It finds resolution in what cannot be conceptualized, the unfathomable, *das Unbegreifliche*, – one of the 'necessary phenomena of this age' (Fichte 1971b: 112, 124). Though intended as a strategy for coping with it, this response only contributes to the prevailing heterogeneity. Enthusiasm [*Schwärmerei*] is its motivation. It accompanies pure reason since, like it, it rises above experience and seeks to construct the universe purely from thought. But where pure reason can account logically for its pursuit of cognitive clarity, enthusiasm has recourse to nothing but 'aleatory notions' [*blosse Einfälle [...] von ohngefähr*]. Its aleatoriness is a 'blind force of thinking', like all blind forces ultimately a force of nature, operating unconsciously: it takes nothing other than clear thinking [*eben das klare Denken*] to defy its dominion (Fichte 1971b: 116, 118). Thus the interventions of blind chance [*das blinde Uhngefähr*] Kant sought to avoid by proposing a scientific law of history here recur as the regressive symptom of science [*Wissenschaft*] in the present age, particularly of the heterogeneous, atomized forms of comprehension it offers (Fichte 1971b: 112, 114; cf. Kant 1982a: 43).

The present age, therefore, appears conflicted and ruptured: the sense of its meta-historical function precarious. Where it acknowledges the scope of pure reason, the significance of idealism, it anticipates the later stages of history's world-plan. But its relapse into enthusiasm and the blind force of thinking testifies to the continuing presence of remnants from this plan's earlier phases. No one (says Fichte) has the right aimlessly to swarm around this empty field of baseless opinions. This would cancel completely the distinctive character of humanity: reason itself. This too might offer an intimation of nihilism. The present age might well permit it: it represents a 'necessary intermediate stage of our species'. This means transcending the common level of ever-expanding heterogeneous facts and values by 'hovering freely between authority [i.e. of reason] and empty nothingness' [*dieses freie Schweben zwischen der Autorität und dem leeren Nichts*] (Fichte 1971b: 83)

2. Historicist designs: Deterring conceptual experimentation

(a.) Historians, however, struggle to assimilate cognitive predicaments proposed by asynchronicity and heterogeneity to their historicist designs. Gay remarks

that the *philosophes* ‘used their classical learning to free themselves from their Christian heritage’ and then, ‘having done with the ancients, turned their face toward a modern world view’, so that ‘the Enlightenment was a *volatile mixture* of classicism, impiety, and science’ (Gay 1995: 8 (my italics)). Ferrone refers to the ‘militant intellectuals, who were the real political and social protagonists of the Enlightenment’, insisting on the ‘realization of the *fragmentary* and *contradictory* character of their ideas and programs of action’, and stressing ‘the necessarily *eclectic* and *polysemic* project’ of the Enlightenment itself (Ferrone 2015: 157, 168 (my italics)). However, predicated on categorical coordinators implying monistic structures and synchronic elements (i.e. ‘epochs’, ‘periods’, ‘ages’, ‘contexts’, ‘processes’, ‘frameworks’), historicist preconception disregards the heterogeneity of values. Historians rely on these categorical coordinators to assign the conflicts and their competing value-systems a specific location in their comprehensive designs, a sophisticated, pre-emptive move that reduces their critical intensity and preserves the historian’s conceptual complacency. This sophisticated effect takes two main forms: heterogeneity mutating into ‘controversies’ and historicism saving history from heterogeneity.

The first sophisticated effect: historicist pre-emption transforms the chaotic conflict of heterogeneous values in a self-defining cultural space into ‘controversies’ inflecting an orderly historical ‘process’. Consider these two extracts from Jonathan Israel’s *Enlightenment Contested* and *Democratic Enlightenment*:

Contemporary **controversies**, then, [...] are the **pivot**, the means to **grasp** not just intellectual history in its **proper perspective** but more importantly the **real relationship** between the social sphere and ideas. For it is the contemporary **controversies** which **connect** philosophers, books, and ideas to politics, approved attitudes, and the public sphere [...]. Examining **controversies** in detail provides a means of testing possible answers to the most pertinent **questions objective to the historical process** itself, enabling us to see what was most discussed and what less [...]. As a methodology it employs **the general historical process** itself to locate the **key ideas of the time** [...].

(Israel 2006: 25 (my emphasis))

Our best chance of understanding the **evolution** of Enlightenment ideas, thinking and debate [...] is to focus primarily on **major public controversies** and examine their broader **context**. [...] In this study, ‘**context**’ means political events, social tensions, legal processes, economic developments, material and aesthetic culture, and educational institutions. By ‘**controversialist**’ method, [...] I mean a **procedure**, starting from the **vantage point of general history**, to determine what the political, social, and cultural **context** of a given controversy is and how the **controversy**’s course is shaped by political, legal, ecclesiastical, academic, and popular interventions [...].

(Israel 2013: 32 (my emphasis))

These extracts typify the conceptual contentment history-focussed behaviour affords. For history to make sense a conventional sense-structure based on administrative classification and supported by categorical coordinators must *a priori* be invested in it. Hence, the reiterated reliance on **process**, **context**, and **procedure** *a priori* to coordinate, specifically to **connect**, the various, conflicted disparate spheres of value in question (e.g. political, legal, ecclesiastical, academic, etc.). Hence, too, the recourse to a **proper perspective, real relationship, vantage point, general history**, essential for blending the ideal, intellectual with real, lived experience. The result, inevitably: the conflict of values, reduced to **controversies**, is itself devalued, declining into an instrument (cf. **pivot, grasp**) of a comprehensive historicist dynamic (cf. **key ideas of the time, evolution of Enlightenment ideas**).

The second sophisticated effect: historicist pre-emption rescues history and the historian from the asynchronous, atomized cultural reality automatically atomizing *their* ‘connections’ and ‘contexts’. It enables him to conceal from himself that he too lives and produces history in the atomized culture of Modernity, that, therefore, his historical values are just one set of heterogeneous values in a world of heterogeneous values. However, by laying claim *a priori* to what is **proper, real, objective, key**, and **major**, hence by asserting history’s cognitive superiority, the historicist thought-style proposes itself as the value of all values, formally synchronizing anything asynchronous. This claim though is futile: the vindication of these values’ ‘propriety’, ‘reality’, ‘objectivity’, and ‘significance’ derives from the historicist structure of processes and contexts they themselves are meant to affirm.

Further, the self-contentment of historicist thinking fails to see in Modernity’s conflicted culture a psychopathological condition. For diagnostic insight it substitutes vacuous metaphor:

“modernity” is the **richly nuanced brew** which arose as a result of the ongoing *conflict* between these two enlightenments [i.e. ‘radical’ and ‘mainstream’], but also (or still more) between both enlightenments, on the one hand, and, on the other, the successive counter-enlightenments, *beginning with Bossuet and culminating in Postmodernism [...]*.

(Israel 2006: 11 (my emphasis/italics))

The limitations of historicist judgement project their own cognitive inadequacy onto the (in this case ‘mainstream’) Enlightenment:

its philosophical **recipes for blending** theological and traditional categories with the new critical-mathematical rationality proved *flawed* in practice, not to say highly *problematic* and shot through with *contradiction*. [...] all the **methodologies of compromise** presented insuperable *disjunctions and difficulties*, rendering the whole philosophico-scientific scholarly arena after 1650 exceedingly *fraught and unstable*.

(ibid. (my emphasis/italics))

The historicist argument expects coherence founded *a priori* on a monistic conception of the Enlightenment as a distinct historical period or historical object underlying its ‘radical’, ‘contested’, and ‘democratic’ aspects. This expectation is evinced in the shift from the metaphorical to the literal in the successive figures: **richly nuanced brew** → **recipes for blending** → **methodologies of compromise**. That it fails, historicism can attribute only to a fatal inadequacy in its object (the Enlightenment), identified by an intensifying sequence of depreciating inferences: *conflict* → *flawed* → *problematic* → *contradiction* → *disjunctions and difficulties* → *fraught and unstable*. That Modernity consists of nothing but heterogeneous, asynchronous, and atomized spheres of values, ideas, and facts, historicism rejects. It lends it instead an orderly historical continuum: *beginning with/culminating in*, that justifies a sweeping, breath-taking assertion that bestows a common identity on Bossuet and Postmodernism. Thus historicism displays both conceptual contentment and comprehensive misconception. The concern via ‘controversies’ to connect ideas to social reality misses the point. It is not about connecting ideas to reality. (In any case, just how does thinking ‘connect’ with attitudes? Why would ideas themselves not be real?) The asynchronicity and atomization of spheres of value reduce necessary connection to haphazard coincidence. That the logic of culture does not necessarily conform to the individual’s existential situation characterizes Modernity’s apprehensive ethos. What historicism proposes as ‘disjunction’ and ‘instability’ within a specific, preconceived historical world, is in fact a struggle between value-systems. Each asserts the priority of its world-conception; each claims the particular historical self-affirmation its conception of the world requires. In attempting to make comprehensive sense of Modernity, present-day historians’ own world-conception – particularly in their field of scholarly expertise with its orderly historical continuities – just further confuses an already confused scene of heterogeneous value-systems. In this cognitive situation categorical coordinators help historians themselves to *compartmentalize*, to produce reassuring ‘connections’ between heterogeneous matters. They thus affirm historians’ own *idealized self-image* as an invulnerable guarantee of Truth.

(b.) Tensions within the personality reflect tensions in its cultural environment. They result from the basic anxiety induced by the competition between ‘theological and traditional categories’ and ‘the new critical-mathematical rationality’ with their own temporal and historical orientation (Israel 2006: 11). They are apparent in the spheres of facts and values, in the **methodologies of compromise**, Israel deploys. He describes the forms these tensions produce: ‘Cartesian dualism, Lockean empiricism, Leibnizian monads, Malebranche’s occasionalism, Bishop Huet’s fideism, the London Boyle Lectures, Newtonian physico-theology, Thomasian eclecticism, German and Swedish Wolffianism’ (ibid.). Inconsistent with each other, be it in the intellectual personality or in the culture, these tensions can, however, be managed in several ways:

α. By *compartmentalization*: a defence mechanism for reducing anxiety, hence promoting an ‘artificial harmony’, by ‘keeping underlying conflicts

from awareness'. It ensures that 'what happens in one compartment does not appear to the neurotic to contradict what happens in another' (Horney 1992: 131, 133–4). That means the *philosophe* from his own perspective in a conflicted environment cannot be deterred from exploring his own 'methodological compromises', thus provoking further conflict. This situation also suggests the loss of a personal 'sense of unity', the 'result of being divided by one's conflicts as a defence for not recognizing them' (ibid.). Hence, at the same time, the same 'age' can pursue progressive positivistic, empirical, experimental science; accommodate various traditional, rationalized forms of theology; and include a sceptical, subversive idealism. Hence, too (for example), Voltaire can support the 'party of humanity' while in his articles in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764–1769) on Abraham and on Solomon, exhibit a visceral anti-Semitic prejudice (Voltaire 1967: 2ff., 376ff.); Hume, in his essay 'Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature', can exalt the diverse behaviour human nature displays, yet in his essay 'Of National Characters' suspect 'the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites' (Hume 1971: 83, 213); Rousseau, in *Émile ou de l'éducation* (1762), can promote human equality but then with the same principle affirm the traditional women's role to be submissive to men (Rousseau 1966: 466). Conversely, as a philosopher Mendelssohn can adhere to Judaism, contribute to Christian culture while justifiably dismissing Lavater's challenge to convert (cf. Altmann 1973: 194ff.). Thus compartmentalization manages a cognitive situation that permits radical reconceptualizations within the *philosophe*'s own sphere of competence. Given that they are theoretical, they immediately conflict with beliefs, habits, customs, and traditions, with deep-seated social attitudes (including those of the *philosophe* himself) resistant to change. 'People', says Voltaire. 'conduct themselves by custom and not by metaphysics' (Voltaire 2008: 65). This troubling divergence between theory and practice, knowledge and social behaviour, between *savoir-faire* and *savoir-être*: Modernity is nothing else.

β. By projecting an *idealized self-image*: a 'means of arrogating to oneself qualities that one does not have or that one has potentially but not factually'. Besides 'camouflaging [...] the unacceptable parts' of conflicts within the personality, 'it represents a kind of artistic creation in which opposites appear reconciled or in which [...] they no longer appear as conflicts to the individual himself'. It has thus 'the enormous subjective value of [...] holding together a divided individual' (Horney 1992: 97, 104, 108). This self-idealization expresses the neurotic personality's 'need to keep up appearances of perfection' (Horney 1966: 216). It is symptomatic of narcissism, a form of 'self-inflation [...] presenting greater values than really exist'; a way of escaping 'the painful feeling of nothingness by molding [oneself] into something outstanding'; a 'capacity [...] to transform shortcomings and failures into something glorious' (Horney 1966: 89, 92, 95).

This character-structure results from an anthropocentric culture. It is well aware that its actual behaviour subverts the lofty self-esteem it theoretically should enjoy – in other words (as Adam Smith puts it), seeing 'with grief and affliction, in how many different features the mortal copy falls short of the

immortal original' (Smith 1982: 247). Hence, the recourse to idealized psychic mechanisms to resolve this conflict: Spinoza's argument, based on it attaining clear and distinct ideas and dedicating itself to a 'species of eternity', that 'our mind, in so far as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God' (cf. Spinoza 1996: 59, P43 Schol.; 174, P30); Adam Smith's 'impartial spectator', a 'great demigod within the breast', as a means of 'scrutinizing the propriety of our own conduct', thereby enabling the individual both to internalize 'the eyes of other people' and to display his own moral superiority aware though he is of the 'imperfect success of all his best endeavours' (Smith 1982: 112, 246–7; cf. Davies 2016c: 233); Kant's concept of duty, the categorical imperative, and the self-administration of the moral law (i.e. personal autonomy), establishing 'Man' as the intellectual and moral foundation of the world. It testifies to the massive effort blocking natural human inclinations requires. But it also projects a self-image so narcissistic, that its self-reflection demands the total conceptual reconstruction of the world (cf. Böhme and Böhme 1985: 486–8).² Metaphysics here enacts sublimation: the displacement of libidinal pressures into cultural achievement; the idealization of the self that identifies its moral accomplishment with the sublime beauty of the 'starry heavens above' (Kant 1967: 186).

γ. By *withdrawing from the world*, a further defence mechanism against anxiety, exemplified by Rousseau, an especially conflicted personality, illustrated not just by compartmentalization but also by withdrawal: a means of achieving independence by restricting one's intellectual and emotional needs, and so reducing one's sense of vulnerability (cf. Horney 1964: 98–9). His *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782) is testimony to his actual physical self-seclusion; his *Confessions* (1782/1789) evince a complex character-structure: admitting to a sense of personal worthlessness but implying an inherent uniqueness and so deserving the self-idealization only autobiography affords. Precisely here Rousseau's cognitive situation exposes its historicist reconception as shallow – as in the following assertion:

Only Rousseau **persistently combined** a strong commitment to deism and divine providence with the complaint that all men are in chains and all societies [...] fundamentally corrupt. But Rousseau [...] was a **strange mixture** of radical, moderate, and Counter-Enlightenment tendencies and on all sides [...] accused of **contradicting himself**.

(Israel 2013: 21 (my emphasis))

This assessment is itself self-contradicting: **combined** implies 'coalescence', 'unity', 'coherence', properties absent from **mixture**; **persistently** suggests a repetitive familiarity at odds with **strange**. It is also self-referential: **strange mixture** is meant to explain **persistently combined**; yet something **persistently combined** (hence something by its recurrence familiar) is hardly **strange**. Here too, affirming a compromising fault in its exquisite *objet* (**contradicting himself**) historicism simply confirms its conceptual contentment.

Vindicated by its own **proper perspective**, this historicist verdict serves its own self-interest.

(c.) Historicist pre-emption denies that philosophical problems are current problems, even though both exemplify the synchronous coincidence of asynchronous ideas and values, and project a-historical or psychologically problematic character-structures. Asynchronous synchronicity constitutes philosophical thought. Philosophical argument coordinates ideas and concepts from quite different 'historical contexts'.

Certainly (as Deleuze and Guattari insist), 'philosophers' lives, the most exterior aspect of their work, obey the laws of routine succession'. Even so, 'their proper names co-exist'. They 'shine like luminous points obliging us to review the components of a concept' or like 'the light from dead stars that now appears more bright than ever'. Philosophy exists for 'what it might become, history does not' [*la philosophie est devenir, non pas l'histoire*]. It is 'the co-existence of maps, not the succession of systems' [*coexistence des plans, non pas succession de systèmes*] (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 58–9). It thus underpins the very idea of conceptual fields or of functional concepts.

Philosophy creates concepts. Though created in history, they resist historical definition. Orientated towards, and with cognitive implications for, an unknown future, they should 'not be confused with the state of things in which they were incarnated'. Co-existing a-temporally through their own elective affinities, they elude the 'before/after', the 'from/to' linear structure of history (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 24–6, 28, 36, 58–9). In producing concepts, thinking is experimentation: '[E]xperimentation is something always going on, something new, remarkable, interesting that replaces the appearance of truth with something more demanding'. By contrast, history is not experimental: rather 'it is only the totality of the almost negative conditions which facilitate experimentation with something that eludes history'. The point is: '[W]ithout history, experimentation would not be determined or conditioned; the experimentation itself is not historical, but philosophical' [*mais l'expérimentation n'est pas historique, elle est philosophique*] (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 106).

Philosophical experimentation (not historical controversies) characterizes the Enlightenment. With its heterogeneous, atomized values, Modernity actually facilitates it. It coordinates experiential diversity – what Bacon calls 'a number and army of particulars [...] so scattered [...] as to distract and confound the understanding' – with cognitive order, the inference of axioms offering 'collateral security' (cf. Bacon 1960: 97 CII; 99, CVI). By contrast (Deleuze and Guattari argue), universal concepts presented (historically) as eternal forms and values are 'the most skeletal and the least interesting' [*les plus squelettiques, les moins intéressants*]. History achieves 'nothing positive by parading these ready-made concepts as skeletons so as to discourage anything creative'. Rather it has a pre-emptive effect: '[I]t fails to see that the ancient philosophers they derived from were already engaged in what it inhibits in their modern counterparts: creating concepts, dissatisfied as they were with cleaning and scraping bones

like historians nowadays' [*ils créaient leurs concepts, et ne se contentaient pas de nettoyer, de racler des os, comme le critique ou l'historien de notre époque*] (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 80–1).

In a culture of atomized values, philosophy's capacity for experimentation can suspend history. So a history of philosophy, beyond its superficial use as a reference work, is a self-contradiction. The synchronized coincidence of asynchronous, heterogeneous components is where conceptual experimentation begins and historicization ends.

Affirming the dominance of mathematical rationality as the means of making the world make sense, thus arranging it for human habitation while extending the boundaries of knowledge, Galileo offers a focal point for the ongoing philosophical re-assessment of the social function of science. Edmund Husserl argues that mathematical rationality in its abstract universality (as pioneered by Galileo) superimposes itself on the world of everyday experience (cf. Husserl 2012a: 22). However, in so reducing the value of personal subjectivity, the social predominance of science has with the concomitant desolation of European culture reached a point of pathological crisis (cf. Husserl 1965: 65; 2012a: 20). In response, Husserl constructs a new philosophy based on a detailed and multifaceted analysis of consciousness that affirms its inherent intentionality and grammar as the basis of knowledge. All thinking objectively about an object is thinking about an object of someone's thinking: there is no getting beyond subjective consciousness (cf. Husserl 2009: 149). There can be no universal concept with its general name because there is no general historical consciousness to construct it.

By contrast, in *Against Method*, Paul Feyerabend argues that 'the process of knowledge production and knowledge distribution was never the free, "objective", and purely intellectual exchange rationalists make it out to be' (Feyerabend 1988: 131). He explores Galileo's cognitive situation both in the seventeenth century and in relation to the philosophy of science now to demonstrate that 'allegiance to new ideas will have to be brought about by means other than arguments'. It requires instead '*irrational means* such as propaganda, emotion, *ad hoc* hypotheses, and appeal to prejudices of all kinds'. He adds: '[W]e need these "irrational means" in order to uphold what is nothing but a blind faith until we have found the auxiliary sciences, the facts, the arguments that turn the faith into sound "knowledge"' (Feyerabend 1988: 119). As evinced in the case of Galileo (and Copernicus before him) this 'uneven development of science' (to borrow Marx's concept) with its many 'conflicts and contradictions', is 'due to the heterogeneity of the material' it is based on (Feyerabend 1988: 111). In this respect too, challenging an orthodox conception of science vindicates in practice, if not necessarily in methodology, experimentation with the synchronous coincidence of asynchronous facts and values.

Philosophy's logical procedures are, therefore, not 'heartless'. They come immersed in cultural heterogeneity; they confront the atomization of values. They thus facilitate its experimental practice. Experimenting with concepts, philosophy recognizes not just that the mind produces various means for understanding the world of everyday experience but also that these means, as mental

products, are fictions. In the widest sense, fiction, ‘conceived as a fictive activity, joins deduction and induction as a third member with equal rights in the system of logical science’ (Vaihinger 1918: 124). Crucial forms of intellectual self-orientation in Enlightenment thinking – e.g. Descartes’ ‘evil genie’, Locke’s *tabula rasa*, Leibniz’s theodicy, Smith’s ‘spectator in the breast’, Rousseau’s ‘noble savage’, and Kant’s *Ding an sich*, besides such widely accepted concepts of metaphysical guidance as the ‘Great Chain of Being’, Providence, Nature, or Man – are powerful for being cast in the mode of fiction, *as if* [*als ob*] they really existed. In experimenting, in creating concepts, generating fictions, philosophy (as Nietzsche argues) works on the verge of nihilism.

(d.) Finally, historicism is temporally pre-emptive. It appoints itself to synthesize the various time dimensions experience discerns. It presumes that the time history occurs in (and administers) – historical time – coordinates planetary (or cosmological) time and biological time (the human personal lifespan). Though habitually mistaken for it, it is distinct from each person’s own internal time-consciousness: what Bergson calls *durée* – the heterogeneity of everyday experience, its recollection and anticipation that constitute the passing of time – is an ‘immediate condition’ [*donnée immédiate*] of consciousness. Historicism derives its authority from the fact that ‘time is a fundamental property of the relationship between the universe and the observer that cannot be reduced to anything else’ (Whitrow 1975: 132). In the nature of things, what happens takes time.

Coordinating world-time and (historical) human-time, historicism projects human self-assertion over the planet as history’s intention. For Droysen in *Historik* (1857–1883) the point of human self-development – after the geological, biological, and zoological development of the planet – is to fulfil the ‘global purpose of humanity’ [*Weltzweck des Menschen*]. It applies to this ‘process’ a final civilizing veneer. History thus becomes – as Droysen interprets evolution – an ‘element within organic nature’ (Droysen 1977: 15, 41, 289, 470). In this comprehensive design, unless they are of ‘world-historical’ importance, individuals have little significance. The individual’s life is but ‘a stitch in the [historical] fabric, a tiny mosaic-tile’ in a grand historicist design (Droysen 1977: 196). In simultaneously assimilating itself to planetary time and sequestering the individual’s personal time-sense, history asserts its monopoly over temporal values, – a monopoly indispensable to comprehensive scope. But in so doing it reveals its own neurotic compartmentalization:

α. Promoting civilizing ideals for the human species implies cognitive indifference towards individual persons. In the name of ‘humanity’ historicism eradicates the ‘humanistic co-efficient’, the subjectivity of individual human consciousness at the basis of all knowledge, all experience. Even if awe-struck by the sublimity of historicist comprehension, the marginalized individual is left despondent.

β. Asserting its cognitive superiority history displays indifference. To trace the ‘fate of the world’ and the ‘development of historical thought’ Droysen

must think from a standpoint high above himself, from a higher self that emerged from his own ‘small person with its slag melted away’ (Droysen 1977: 238–9). (The self-idealization historical knowledge affords the historian replicates the self-idealization biological knowledge affords the natural scientist – as Huxley remarks: ‘[N]ow [Man] stands raised upon it [i.e. this knowledge] as on a mountain top, far above the level of his humble fellows, and transfigured from his grosser nature by reflecting here and there, a ray of sunshine from the infinite source of truth’ (Huxley 2001: 114).) However, this self-idealization needs the distressing spectacle of suffering history displays. For Droysen conflict energizes history: ‘[T]he noise and conflict of the real world is infinitely richer and more refreshing than a state of silence’ (Droysen 1977: 339). So too for Hegel: depressing though destruction appears, the effect wears off in the daily routines of personal life when the chaotic ruins can be enjoyed safely from afar on the opposite river-bank. History persists as the ‘slaughter-block’ for sacrificing peoples’ hopes, states’ wisdom, and individuals’ virtues: reflecting on its final purpose [*Endzweck*] is inevitable (Hegel 1961: 64). Historicization apparently requires a propensity for emotional self-detachment.

Coordinating social and natural time dimensions, historicism synchronizes the inevitably asynchronous materials it documents. It would thus repress what for Modernity is a basic anxiety: that time itself and, therefore, the relationship between observer and world have become problematic; that the quest for knowledge, not least historical knowledge, relies on a wasteful economy of cognitive effort. This cognitive situation has the following interrelated facets.

In seeing themselves as modern, philosophers – *inter alia* such different ones as Descartes, Bacon, or Spinoza – declared the knowledge accumulated since the Ancients, the knowledge cultivated in the Schools, as redundant. Bacon is typically forthright: ‘[F]rom **our age**’, (he says) ‘if it but knew its own strength and chose to essay and exert it, much more might fairly be expected than from the *ancient times*, inasmuch as it is **a more advanced age of the world**, and stored and stocked with infinite experiments and observations’ (Bacon 1960: 81; LXXXIV (my emphasis)). Here self-idealization promotes historical time (**our age**) to a cognitively enriched planetary time (**advanced age of the world**). The heterogeneous outcome of present cognitive effort renders received doctrine (from the *ancient times*) obsolete. Cognitive reorientation requires temporal reconception: it automatically historicizes – as Hume remarks: ‘Two thousand years [...] are a small space of time to give any tolerable perfection to the sciences; and perhaps we are still in too early an age of the world to discover any principles which will bear the examination of the latest posterity’ (Hume 1969: 320).

Thus scientific knowledge reconstrues the relationship between time-consciousness and personal existential scope. In Voltaire’s *Micromégas* (1752) the initial discussion between him, an inhabitant of Sirius, and an inhabitant of Saturn focusses on their predetermined cosmological origins: their respective gigantic size, their physiology, and their personal life-expectancy. These characteristics far exceed those of the insect-like inhabitants of this ‘small pile of mud’, this ‘mole-hill’, the Earth. But *Micromégas* still complains about life

being short, ‘a drop of water in an immense ocean’, that he foregoes making plans for himself (Voltaire 1960: 97, 99, 103). In his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) Fontenelle imagines being suspended above the world for twenty-four hours, just one revolution of the planet, to experience the ‘infinite variety’ – the heterogeneous phenomena – on its surface (Fontenelle 1973: 42). Adumbrated here is the dilemma of the empiricist: with knowledge depending on immediate observation, observation itself depends on its cognitive situation, its spatial and temporal standpoint. Even so the cosmological perspective is privileged. Though exposing the limitations of the human perspective, the sublime prospect of the plurality of worlds is a breath of freedom (cf. Fontenelle 1973: 105). Conversely, for Constantin-François Volney in *Les Ruines ou Méditation sur les Révolutions des Empires* (1791) the cosmological view offers the melancholic prospect of a world laid waste by conflict arising from humanity’s propensity for self-destruction (Volney 1989: 189ff.).

(e.) Modern science exposes the existential inadequacies of its anthropic template. Acquiring knowledge requires not just time, forethought, and effort, but more time, forethought, and effort than one person can muster and their life-span permits. No mortal being created as a small or large part of Nature can aspire – Leibniz or Spinoza notwithstanding – to a transcendental view of Nature, hence, the recourse to the human species as an intelligent mega-organism capable of realizing its cognitive aims and redressing individual existential inadequacy. This inconsistency between existential adequacy and cognitive demand takes heterogeneous forms:

α. As in D’Alembert’s and Diderot’s realization expressed in its ‘Discours préliminaire des éditeurs’ (1751) that the ultimate perfection of the *Encyclopédie*, such an immense project, would be ‘the work of centuries’ [*l’ouvrage des siècles*]: ‘[I]t had needed centuries to begin it; it will need them to finish it’ [*il a fallu des siècles pour commencer; il en faudra pour finir*] (d’Alembert 2011: 157);

β. As in Gibbon’s justification for writing his *Memoirs*, that due to ‘some common principle in the minds of men [,] our imagination is always active to enlarge the narrow circle in which Nature has confined us. Fifty or a hundred years may be allotted to an individual; but we stretch forwards beyond death with such hopes as Religion or Philosophy will suggest, and we fill up the silent vacancy that precedes our birth by associating ourselves to the authors of our existence’ (Gibbon 1984: 41);

γ. As in Fichte’s assertion that ‘to grasp the *a priori* essence [*das Apriorische*] of rational science [*Wissenschaft*], partly as creating the realm of ideas; partly as determining Nature [...] requires cold, calm thinking, incessantly quarrelling with itself, correcting and enlightening itself’; but that ‘to achieve in it anything of significance costs time and effort, and half of one’s life in the process’ (Fichte 1971b: 124);

δ. As in Michelet’s reflection in the préface (1869) of his seventeen-volume *Histoire de France* (1833–1869) that ‘his life was in this book’, that ‘it has passed into it’, that ‘it has been the only event in his life’. It had taken him forty years

to complete, though when he began he never suspected it would take so long. And so, though with no sense of regret, 'he has passed the world by and taken history as his life' (Michelet 1935: 39, 40);

ε. Worse, though, is the realization that studious effort generally goes to waste, its aims and methodology having been misguided, its thought-style self-misleading. The distinction between knowledge and illusion (specifically the philosopher's self-delusion or the historian's documented simulations) tends to be blurred. Despondency haunts the restless quest for comprehension. As Fontenelle remarks, philosophy derives from human beings having 'a curious mind but poor eyesight': '[T]he difficulty is, they want to know more than they can see'. The result is 'they see things as quite different from the way they are'. This 'unenviable' situation leaves true philosophers 'spending their life disbelieving what they see and trying to guess what they don't see' (Fontenelle 1973: 29). And yet, still affirming the concept of Enlightenment but not its belief in cumulative knowledge, Weber in 'Wissenschaft als Beruf' ['Science as a Vocation'] (1919) outlines a remedy. The outcomes of science [*Wissenschaft*] inevitably become outdated: they are meant to. That signifies their progress; that is their sense. That contributes to a longstanding and still ongoing 'disenchantment of the world' intended to make it calculable and manageable. Moreover, on this basis, Weber can assert the ethical value of science: that it cultivates the lucid capacity of scientists to account for the ultimate sense of what they do, that it relies on the cardinal virtue of 'simple intellectual honesty' [*schlichte intellektuelle Rechtschaffenheit*] (Weber 1988: 594, 608, 613). He thus redeems the Enlightenment from Rousseau's severe doubt – expressed in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750) – that a scientific culture, studiousness as a social attitude, could ever encourage virtue (cf. Rousseau 1971: 47ff; §ii). In any case, the fate of the Enlightenment itself testifies to superseded, if not wasted, cognitive effort. The Enlightenment may have repudiated the then-prevailing scholasticism, but the development of positivistic academic-technical disciplines has far exceeded its scientific achievements. La Mettrie's *homme machine* is realized in contemporary robotics.

In Modernity a person's lifetime becomes instrumentalized, as a vital resource to be mined and exploited. In this situation, adherence to a particular intellectual stance, if exposed as deceptive, will have wasted not just time, but lifetime. Hence the academic's conceptual complacency, the affirmation of knowledge already known, as approved measures of cognitive reliability. But the principle of identity, connecting thinking and being, operates here too. Once the cultural ambience mutates, one's own thinking, convinced of its veracity, might reorientate itself accordingly. In this case, the dynamic of temporally limited personal life and the extensive demands of intellectual existence diverge. The resulting tension between personal time-consciousness and existential values produced by philosophical experimentation helps define Modernity. The risk of a lifetime invalidated by scientific or cognitive progress explains why in response modern knowledge hardly permeates society's general intellect.³ Where the Enlightenment is concerned, the asynchronicity

between biological limitations and intellectual demands leaves the foundation of knowledge, 'Man', radically insecure.

(f.) Time, therefore, neither 'contains' nor 'drives' historical events. Rather it coordinates any cognitive situation with the knowledge it discloses. But history testifies to justifiable human intentions either for its immediate agents or subsequently for historians applying categorically coordinated templates to their actions. Time also reveals the world's hitherto unsuspected potential [*l'imprévu*]. It exposes in human intentions the unconscious, unintended ramifications of their rationalizations.

Time thus enables the historical unconscious – a further concept constitutive of Modernity – to reveal itself. The historical unconscious underpins its heterogeneity. Its *historical* character reconciles through historicism its compartmentalized forms of knowledge: scientific empiricism and transcendental idealism. Its *psychopathological* character attributes the presumed mental normality supporting the human sciences to both the sublimation of innate drives such as *Eros* (sexual and social drives) and *Thanatos* (the death-drive) and behaviour-patterns betraying repressed traumas, anxieties, and desires. Both are disturbing: whatever human beings think they are doing in history or to history, particularly through the irrational, incalculable art of politics, the eventual outcome is unforeseeable, *imprévu* (cf. Montesquieu 1949: 110). Unsuspected, barely perceptible factors predetermine both its historicist and psychopathological aspects.

Natural science and history run parallel in the development of the human species: that is Eduard von Hartmann's premise in his *Philosophie des Unbewußten* [*The Philosophy of the Unconscious*] (1869ff.) The unconscious is integral to the growth and development of organic life, as a comprehensive survey of natural scientific knowledge confirms. The unconscious is also integral to human development, as evinced by its historicist articulation. Like Droysen, Hartmann sees history in terms of human progress intended to realize the intellectual potential of the species and eventually the ideal of liberal-bourgeois self-satisfaction. On the way it involves nations fighting for the right to exist, economic exploitation, even the eugenic refinement of the species – this dynamic resulting from 'the driving unconscious ideas of history', evinced as much in mass-behaviour, such as mass-migration, as in the work of the individual artistic genius (Hartmann 1876: I, 328–9, 330–1, 332, 341–2). However, only in their aftermath, after their eventual emergence into consciousness, do these ideas reveal their contribution to a possible 'comprehensive *organism* of cultural development' (Hartmann 1876: I, 326, 328 (my italics)).

Hartmann's conception of history may well seem materialistic, specifically vitalistic, akin to Schopenhauer's 'will' or Spengler's conception of 'high culture' as the 'vigilance of a single monstrous organism' (Spengler 1976: II, 596). But its cultural-historical vindication is idealistic, relying on Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* [*System of transcendental Idealism*] [1800]. Schelling vindicates historicism by reconciling the freedom of human action with the necessity directing history towards an objective, 'single harmonic goal'.

For (rather like Droysen but also like Ferguson or Kant) Schelling insists: the human species is the historical agent, not each particular individual (Schelling 2000: 268). Expressing solely individuals' subjective freedom, history might seem disharmonious, offering nothing but asynchronous synchronicity, the heterogeneity of atomized facts and values. However, inherent in free human action, the unconscious has a synthesizing function. It directs itself towards the absolute, the historical goal and intention of the human species. It offers a 'basis for bringing together' action that would otherwise remain free but disorientated (Schelling 2000: 269). It enables Hartmann to claim that knowledge of the unconscious in nature provides evidence for intellectual design in history 'by bringing scientific lucidity to the individual's hitherto mystically postulated relationship to the absolute', the ultimate goal of history (Hartmann 1876: I, 344–5).

Concerned with reconciling essentially heterogeneous facts and values, Hartmann's cognitive situation characterizes Modernity. The limited consciousness directing individual freedom and the inscrutability of history's absolute purpose define the historical unconscious. They identify an irreducible core of apprehension in its constant self-historicization. The ultimate meaning of human action – of 'Man' himself – depends on nothing the individual agent can know: only metaphysical speculation can validate its historical sense. Hartmann's conception of the unconscious may well derive from natural scientific data, but he still prioritizes metaphysical idealism. Like 'history', a blanket term such as 'the unconscious' accommodates chaotic heterogeneity by projecting fundamental sense. But the reconciliation is flawed because 'unconscious' remains ambiguous. Schelling focusses on *das Bewußtlose*, on 'what escapes awareness', 'what the agent is unaware of' (cf. Schelling 2000: 264). Hartmann focusses on *das Unbewußte*, on the unconscious, including physiological phenomena (e.g. the heart beating, the lungs breathing) that operate automatically (cf. e.g. Hartmann 1876: I, 158ff.). Further, when assimilated to the metaphysical, absolute purpose of history, the concept of the historical unconscious becomes repressive, symptomatic of the psychopathology of historicized life. It masks the apprehensiveness that comes with Modernity, that Modernity itself intensifies: that asynchronous and heterogeneous values cannot be reconciled, hence that the individual becomes incapable of recognizing him- or herself in any historical comprehension of his or her predicament, and still vulnerable to the psychopathological stress induced by the asynchronous tensions of historicized life. Evident here is a fundamental characteristic of Modernity: the objective absolutes – such as religious belief or historical process – lose credibility, but their subjective cognitive habit still senselessly persists. Predicated on comprehension, the available historical knowledge pre-empts insight into the reality of the human situation. Far from enlightening, this knowledge conceals the redundancy in which it arises. It leaves people defenceless when what it represses returns – when they must confront history's unintended psychopathic consequences, realities characterized by 'flawed achievements' [*parapraxis*; *Fehlleistungen*],

a sado-masochistic proclivity for destructiveness, and, in this ‘pure culture of the death-drive’ [*Reinkultur des Todestrieb*s] bereft of absolution, an accumulating record of human self-incrimination (cf. Freud 1987: 216; 1982: 203). In securing itself by monopolizing as historical time the various time dimensions experience discloses, historical continuity sequesters personal time for its superior occasions. The individual is left picking over the shattered remnants of his or her existence.

3. Historicism: Its naïve form

(a.) ‘Our habitual logic is a logic of retrospection’: ‘[I]t cannot resist throwing back into the past, in a state of possibility and virtuality, present-day realities, so that what is composed now must, in its eyes, have always existed’ (Bergson 2006: 19). But present and past are necessarily misaligned: the facts then the present now recognizes may not have been recognized then in their present form. The facts now present may not even have been facts then; then they may have had a different future trajectory: ‘[T]hese facts were not yet signs’ (Bergson 2006: 17). They had yet to acquire a documentary value. Stressing this misalignment is indispensable. The accepted scholastic version rests now on the unintended outcomes of agents then: the historical unconscious mesmerizes academic connoisseurship. Still its retrospective view is quite simplified. To understand the past and the emergence of historical facts (as Bergson says) would require reproducing something impossible: a past as inscrutable and as multi-faceted as the historical potential of the present now is. But Enlightenment scholarship resists correcting its retrospective stance. It discloses nothing other than its narcissistic self-reflection.

Predicated on the axis **then** ↔ **now**, the historicist approach to Enlightenment historicism is structurally compromised. Appreciating the different values attached to history in the self-defining field of heterogeneous facts and values that constitutes Modernity requires reconception. This proposes two main historicist types of history: *naïve* self-projection and *sophistical* reconstruction. The naïve self-projection might well describe Enlightenment historicism, the sophistical its subsequent and current form. But this distinction is not entirely adequate. ‘Naïve’ and ‘sophistical’ are aspects of the same belief-system, the same relationship formed through transference: the ‘sophist’ with all his or her knowledge needs the ‘naïve’, apparently inexperienced interlocutor; the naïve perspective in its simplicity highlights the self-deception of sophistical strategies. Co-dependent they represent contrasting mental attitudes.

‘Naïve’ connotes openness towards the world; receptivity of both what is and what might yet be possible; the need to satisfy curiosity; a sense of honesty – even at one’s own cost – in not making exorbitant claims for what one knows; the recourse to sceptical hesitation whenever one’s own and others’ premises clash. Locke illustrates this attitude in his remarks on the training of the understanding. He asserts there is ‘nothing of more use to [it]’ than the ‘distinct gradual growth in knowledge’ which being ‘firm and sure [...] carries

its own light with it in every step of its progression in an easy and orderly train' (Locke 1996: 217).

By contrast 'sophistical' connotes pride in the knowledge acquired, hence conceptual contentment; a sense of social superiority derived from having acquired this knowledge; the pretension to 'having seen it all before', 'to knowing it already', particularly to patronize arguments detracting from its orthodoxy; the appreciation – and with that the exploitation – of its cognitive and social worth. Ferrone illustrates this attitude when vindicating in *The Enlightenment. The History of an Idea* his commitment to the Enlightenment and the historical-methodological basis it presupposes. 'This book was written', he says, 'in part to *defend* this noble *legacy* [i.e. 'the dignity of man'] against recurring attacks from the enemies of the Enlightenment, in the awareness that the search for historical *truth* can and must still have a public *function*'. He adds:

I have sought to rethink the historical experience of the Enlightenment as a whole, from different points of view, keeping well in mind its irreducible vitality and the ever more urgent need to *clarify* its *authentic meaning* in face of the repeated attempts to manipulate and *obfuscate* it that have taken place in the course of the centuries down to our time.

(Ferrone 2015: xiv (my italics))

While the philosopher 'naïvely' advocates the gradual development of the understanding as the precondition of enlightened knowledge, the 'sophistical' historian already possesses it (cf. '*authentic meaning*') and knows its worth (cf. '*legacy*', '*truth*'). With these values he justifies both its instrumentalization (cf. '*defend*', '*function*', '*clarify*') and his superior stance that enables him to see through the '*obfuscations*' he deprecates that have occurred 'in the course of centuries'. What differentiates 'naïve' from 'sophistical' knowledge is, on the one hand, a self-determining quest for intellectual self-realization; on the other, administrative procedures for organizing and disseminating cultural values. The one 'progresses' knowledge, the other 'clarifies' knowledge already known.

This differentiation produces two types of historicism. It acknowledges two aspects of the same basic form of Modernity's self-knowledge: the comprehensive understanding of history, the attempt by one set of heterogeneous values to impose its order on heterogeneous, 'polysemic' facts and asynchronicities across the entire field of culture. One type, the 'sophistical' form of historicism, reveals that Enlightenment values are flawed [*Fehlleistung*]. The other, dependent on a 'naïve' form of historicism, reveals Enlightenment values not yet succeeding either. Both types of historicism thus raise questions about the existential advantages and disadvantages of historicization as a cognitive strategy, be it deferring to what is vital, new, in the course of development [*Werden*], be it just scrupulously setting out a 'balance-sheet' [*Abrechnung*] of the past's achievements (cf. Nietzsche 1988a: 257, 267–8).

(b.) The Enlightenment cultivated a naïve, historicizing self-projection. Its advocates projected onto history an ideal image of their social, political, and cultural aspirations. Thus they assimilated both their future (the future as they imagined it) and their past (the past as they understood it) into their actual cognitive situation. Its demands determined history's historicist design or, conversely, this 'naïve' historicism was meant to affirm their aspirations. 'Naïve' historicist self-projection was, therefore, an instrument not just of thought, but also of the *philosophes*' self-ideal. It took several forms:

α. It operated as compensation. For Kant the late eighteenth century was an 'age of Enlightenment' but not an 'Enlightened age' (Kant 1982b: 59). Unattainable for any individual at any one time, the state of being enlightened would be achieved at some remote, future date by the human species as a whole. In the meantime, each individual could at least find consolation in acting rationally to realize this end.

β. It worked also as inspiration. For Condorcet the inauguration of a world finally permitting the realization of human beings' infinite potential was imminent: '[T]he epoch of one of the great revolutions of the human species [being] within touch'. Knowledge was virtually complete, with 'philosophy [having] nothing left but to gather and order facts and to demonstrate the useful truths arising from their combinations and their comprehensive totality' (Condorcet 1971: 83, 86).

γ. It expresses an ethical obligation. It vindicates a self-imposed responsibility: that 'we human beings' need more than just our contemporaries. As the cornerstone of Enlightenment self-knowledge, 'Man' needed to be more than just a nexus in an immutable metaphysical design, the Great Chain of Being, especially when this design was vulnerable to sceptical, empiricist, or materialist critiques. History, specifically its naïve historicist conception, met this need. The present was not situated in a shifting continuum between humanity past and humanity future. Rather it was a temporal space they converged on and diverged from. It offered a forum for indubitable common interests. Motivated by curiosity and pride, and with 'a natural avidity to embrace at once the past, the present, and the future', naïve historicist self-projection fulfilled the desire 'at the same time to live with those who will follow us, and to have lived with those who have preceded us' (D'Alembert 2011a: 92).

δ. It was an expression of human solidarity, but it thereby made a pre-emptive claim on the present imagination of what the future world could be. This pre-emptive intention is intrinsic to historicism. The future must incontrovertibly ratify its comprehensive design, – the future, ironically, that is beyond the horizon of expectation. Naïve historicism may well offer a present forum of perennially common human interests. However, as Diderot confirms, collating the existing knowledge of Man, elaborating its comprehensive system, proves its perennial value within the present forum only if it is passed on to posterity to complete it with gratitude and its own reciprocal effort (Diderot 1994a: 363, 374). As a material manifestation of the common forum of perennial interests predicated on Man, consequently transmitting the knowledge accumulated by those alive

now to those coming afterwards, the *Encyclopédie* by its presence ensured that the work of past centuries would not have been ‘useless work’ for future generations. These latter, ‘becoming better informed’, would ‘become at the same time more virtuous and more happy’. So they, the *philosophes*, the *savants*, ‘will not die without being worthy of mankind’ (Diderot 1994a: 363). This pre-emptive claim on the future did not just mean (as Diderot remarked) that the *philosophes* equated posterity with ‘a promised land, a kind of utopia’, the equivalent of Christian Heaven (cf. Becker 1960: 119, 122ff.). Rather it is a reflective device, a means of receiving here and now the approbation of the world to come. Already a defence mechanism against adversity, its self-ideal, transferred onto the future, enhances its self-assurance here and now.

(c.) But this conception of historical continuity, its very premise, ‘Man’, is flawed. That is symptomatic of its naivety. Its reliance on compartmentalization, self-idealization, and self-withdrawal is indispensable, indications as they are of its neurotic character. Affirming anthropocentric to displace theocratic knowledge, the Enlightenment is usually represented as ‘groping for’ Modernity (cf. Gay 1979: 249ff.). But history, like ‘Man’, is a comprehensive term superimposing a pattern of sense on a ‘polysemic’ culture. As these examples suggest, elucidating meaning and purpose of the species as a whole requires self-idealization and sublimation:

α. Pascal asserts ‘that the succession of human beings over the course of all the centuries, must be considered as one and the same man that exists always and learns continuously’. With his recent (i.e. modern) scientific experience this same, but now more mature, ‘universal man’ surpasses in knowledge the Ancients, representatives as they are of the childhood of the human species (Pascal 1963b: 232).

β. For Hume history uniquely testifies to the advancement of human self-knowledge, since ‘a man acquainted with history may [...] be said to have lived from the beginning of the world, and to have been making continual additions to his stock of knowledge in every century’ (Hume 1971: 561).

γ. For Herder ‘Man’ constitutes a moral potential that expresses itself only through history. This potential requires Man not just to *know*, but to *be*, himself. History drives its governing ‘principle law of Nature’: ‘Man *be* Man!’ [*Der Mensch sei Mensch!*] (Herder 2013: 470; 15.i). It thus evinces a sublime, transcendental plan to be realized dynamically through human self-idealization. Though it exposes a discrepancy between what ‘Man’ is and what ‘Man’ could become, it reconciles it through human self-realization, through inspiring Man to cultivate his own essential humanity [*Humanität*]. Thus, in an act of self-idealization set in motion by the necessitousness of the human situation, history realizes the very ‘principle of [God’s] effectiveness’: that God made Man a ‘God on Earth’ (Herder 2013: 471; 15.i).

δ. For Kant the issue of natural human rights requires the future to be kept open so as to inaugurate a global system in which every single human being would have equal citizenship. To restrict human behaviour by means of custom, tradition, or religious dogma, hence to pre-empt the moral self-fulfilment of the human species, would be a crime against human nature (Kant 1982a: 45ff.; 1982b: 57ff.).

But this naïve conception of historical continuity is flawed also because it is compromised by its unconscious component, by what it unintentionally overlooks, as in these respects:

ε. The *philosophes*' actual cognitive situation may well coordinate past, present, and future. The past leads irrevocably to this present; the future will take this legacy on to its realization the present has already preconceived. This consistent sense of temporality is identified (e.g.) by Ferguson in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) when he writes:

In other classes of animals, the individual [...] attains, in the compass of a single life, to all the perfection his nature can reach: but in the human kind, the **species has a progress as well as the individual**; they build in every *subsequent* age on foundations formerly laid; and, in a *succession* of years, tend to a perfection in the application of their faculties, to which the aid of long experience is required, and to which many generations have combined their endeavours.

(Ferguson 1995: 10 (my emphasis))

But this symmetry collapses on construction. Whether or not it also implies 'process' or 'progression', continuity cannot support the cognitive demands placed on it. The individual human life-span, the human species' biological time-span, and the historical time dimension (the slow progress of both to human self-perfection) are inevitably asynchronous. Individual human action and intention at any time in history inevitably fall short of their inherent potential and their ultimate achievement.

ζ. This predicament defines a basic trait of Modernity – for good and for evil: the diremption between the ideal structures and goals individuals can imagine and the unpredictable inadequacy of personal moral and intellectual capacity to achieve them; the apprehension that, however anyone now acts, whatever anyone now envisages, history – without anyone being conscious of it but through this inadequacy – takes its own inscrutable course. It presents itself as the 'unforeseen' (*l'imprévu*). Hence historicism's default attitude. It is represented by both 'classical historicism' – by (e.g.) Vico, Herder, Kant, Schiller, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Schelling, or Hegel – and current historical scholarship in general, but also by Droysen's *Historik* on which these variants of historical comprehension converge. It ensures that however individuals act – however unsociably, however antagonistically – their collective action expressed in its unconscious or unintentional outcomes will always make sense, will always disclose a self-transcendent meaning. Confronting the pure culture of the death-drive symptomatic of Modernity, historicism offers redemptive sublimation, a compensating human self-idealization.

η. Besides continuity implying what Locke calls the 'gradual growth in knowledge' and 'progression in an easy and orderly train', naïve historicism focusses on finality, on the ultimate purpose of this 'growth' and 'progression'. Imbued with moral duty (and thereby 'co-operating with the Deity' and emulating Nature), it affirms 'the same great *end*, the order of the world, and the

perfection and happiness of human nature' (Smith 1982: 166, 168). So, as the Enlightenment's comprehensive cultural principle, humanity's idealized self must be fixated on finality; it would defeat itself otherwise. This strategy of sublimation has, therefore, to be pre-emptive: it must project itself onto the future. Diderot and D'Alembert see themselves as custodians of Man's intellectual and moral progress, of Man's self-idealization. The *Encyclopédie*, therefore, becomes 'a sanctuary where human knowledge would be sheltered from the times and revolutions' (D'Alembert 2011a: 153). For this reason it must make a pre-emptive claim on the future; for this reason it *had to be* 'the work of centuries' to come (D'Alembert 2011a: 157).

θ. The Enlightenment's intellectual and moral idealism did want to change the world. But this self-same idealism necessarily precluded any 'change in the conditions of change' it had already proposed. It could imagine society changing but following 'a predetermined path that cannot change' – as illustrated by Mercier's utopian novel *L'an 2440* (1771) (cf. Popper 1974: 51). Idealism requires determinism for its eventual, envisaged realization. Its ultimate goal would not otherwise fulfil what the present knows only as logical projections. The historicist (according to Popper) may well, therefore, seem 'deficient in imagination', incapable of 'imagining a change in the conditions of change'. This 'deficiency' though pre-empts the very plausible misgiving that there is 'no valid reason to expect of any repetition of a historical development that it will *continue* to run parallel to its prototype' (Popper 1974: 111, 130). Consequently, this 'imaginative incapacity' offers a guideline: how else could anyone discern the predetermined path amidst a multitude of events? Any deviation – especially if produced by the historical unconscious – might appear too late to be rectified. Idealism requires determinism also to mitigate the *philosophes'* apprehension of social and existential insecurity. It offers them 'compensation for the loss of an unchanging world' caused by their own modernizing endeavours, by what Peter Gay calls the 'confusing and at times frightening development' of the natural sciences, – of *savoir-faire* as opposed to *savoir-être* (Gay 1979: 160). It mitigates the risk of their own cultural self-disinheritance should coordinating their precursors with posterity fail (cf. Popper 1974: 161). Further, 'clinging to the faith that change can be foreseen because it is ruled by an unchanging law' (ibid.), evident in their providential conception of history, offered self-defence against rival but deviant Modernist world-views: perplexing cynicism, actually enhanced by moralist thought, – as displayed by the protagonist in Diderot's *Le neveu de Rameau* (1761–1762), at once remaining who he is while acting and speaking in any socially ingratiating manner [*je reste ce que je suis, mais j'agis et je parle comme il convient*] (Diderot 1966: 81).

ι. Furthermore, the *Encyclopédie* (as Diderot intended) may well have wished to protect Enlightenment knowledge from civil disturbance. But it could not offer it refuge from the unpredictable intervention of the historical unconscious it itself had unwittingly augmented. Particularly in this projected comprehensive form, the Enlightenment had no defence against unforeseeable future

revolutions in knowledge itself, – against the self-revolutionizing tendency in knowledge the *philosophes* themselves had endorsed. They endorsed it because it appeared predetermined. But predetermination is a present intention of the present condition of knowledge. Its future condition can never be known now: if it could be, it would still only be its present understanding. Impelled by its unconscious historical potential, Modernity is nothing other than this ongoing cognitive revolution. It dissolves the comprehensive encyclopaedic project, the very project intended to invest categorical order and historicist meaning in its polysemic heterogeneity. Knowledge predicated on ‘Man’ represented in its discourse of universality simultaneously ruptures into discrete positivistic disciplines which contribute to the synchronous occurrence of various asynchronous cultural perspectives. Apparent in their own technical discourses, their own pace of development, thereby contributing to the ‘formalization of thought’, these disciplines may well organize life today but, in doing so, atomize the very premise, ‘Man’, that sustains them (cf. Foucault 1966: 355ff.; Pagden 2013: viii). Even so, in revolutionizing itself, Modernity also compromises itself. Based on technical specialization, thereby atomizing its object, thus effectively ephemeralizing its outcome, its knowledge-system, frenetically busy, only generates redundancy (cf. Davies 2016a: 91, 122–3, 142). Here too cognitive and social habits persist long after the knowledge-system that first inculcated them has disintegrated.

The historical unconscious compromises the finality of historicism – and with it the meta-historical ‘absolute’ or ‘world-spirit’ that would make history make sense. It automatically negates any ideal historicist agenda. Its interventions, be they progressive or regressive, keep breaking historicist projections into self-historicizing sequences. Modernity – the fixation on the ever-latest thing – by definition can never be completed. Constantly sophistically reinterpreted, the Enlightenment’s naïve historicist world-conception keeps historicizing itself. It becomes self-conscious too late, after its projected continuity disintegrates. Its values, now atomized, turn ephemeral.

4. Historicism: Its sophisticated form

(a.) For Montesquieu ‘historians are severe examiners of the actions of those who have appeared on Earth, the very image of those magistrates of Egypt who called up for judgement the soul of all the deceased’ (Montesquieu 1949: 1133). Historians might reject the hyperbolic analogy but retain its censorious authority. But the sophisticated historicization of the Enlightenment never attains this ideal, be it desirable or not. The reason is: the comprehensive project that is the history of the Enlightenment is already implicated *in* the Enlightenment. Sophisticated historicism derives from the Enlightenment its dependence on evidence-based, scientific truth. It contributes to its anthropocentric premise (i.e. ‘Man’) by reviewing the scope of human endeavour. Ascertaining ‘what it is to be human’, it offers a comprehensive technical-managerial resource for evaluating the past and extracting from it allegedly useful lessons for the

future. It affirms knowledge not just as a powerful instrument but also as an instrument of power. Finally, with its technical capacity to make sense of what happens whatever happens, it meets the need for a transcendental purpose or meaning as much in the individual's as in the human species' existence. That is to say: in passing a historical judgement on the Enlightenment it automatically passes judgement on itself (as in its constant re-evaluation of 'traditions' in Enlightenment historiography). It both assesses its own commitment to the Enlightenment and evaluates its capacity to advance itself.

(b.) Underpinning history as an academic discipline, this form of historicism is sophisticated in several respects. They evince a deceptive reflex. They subvert their self-image of authoritative certainty by the rhetorical and conceptual techniques that project it – as in the following examples:

α. *The assumption of historical continuity* offers a consequential link between the Enlightenment and the present day, between the late seventeenth and the early twenty-first centuries. Here it elides the temporal character of the world with a structure of historical meaning derived from a brief set of sequences representing (to date) some two hundred and fifty years. Modernity is their consequential *telos*, their predestination. However, present Modernity and the Enlightenment's predestination need to be construed as more than coincidental for their consequentiality to make historical sense. Historians, therefore, reinforce the indifferent, purely temporal sequence by recourse to 'psychic additions' (to use Whitehead's phrase), specifically to categorical coordinators, guaranteed to supply sense and meaning to the prevailing heterogeneity and asynchronicity. Projecting *structures of coherence* (e.g. 'period', 'century'; 'cause', 'transcendent agent or principle' (i.e. 'Enlightenment'), causal verbs (i.e. 'making', 'shaping')), *dynamic forces* (e.g. 'process', 'course', 'evolution', 'impact'), and *stabilizing components* (e.g. 'tradition', 'origin', 'roots', 'heritage', 'legacy'), thereby coordinating change with continuity, difference with sameness, they ensure history makes sense.⁴

That categorical coordinators are integral to the sophisticated historicist definition of the Enlightenment shows them as essential for historical comprehension – as in these typical extracts:

(a.) 'The *Enlightenment* [...] was the most important and profound intellectual, social, and cultural **transformation** of the Western world since the *Middle Ages* and the most formative in **shaping** *modernity*. [...] the **product** of a **particular** *era*, it has profoundly **affected every aspect** of *modernity*'

(Israel 2013: 3)

(b.) 'In the **course** of the *eighteenth century* a long and complicated **process** that had begun in the middle of the *sixteenth century* **finally** came to a head. It saw the **emergence** in people's consciousness of the idea that they were living in *new times*, *times* that were completely different from any *previous epoch*: a "**modern**" *era*, characterized both by its otherness from the *past*

[...] and by its ability to see the **present** as new in so far as it contained the **seeds** of the **future**'

(Ferrone 2015: 5)

(c.) '[...] in its intention to transform the most significant, most lasting insights available to the western philosophical **tradition** in such a way as to make them **useable** in a world from which God had been finally [...] removed; [...] by insisting [...] on its own unfinished nature, the Enlightenment quite simply created the **modern** world. It is, indeed, *impossible to imagine* any aspect of **contemporary** life in the West without it'

(Pagden 2013: 345)

Continuity requires more than time passing: any moment discloses asynchronous elements such as Fichte's past 'remnants' [*Überbleibsel*] or anticipated futures. It requires more than *sequence*, the heterogeneous flux of phenomena. It also needs *consequence*, since that implies *final* sense. It arises figuratively through mobilizing categories that construe various sequences as meaningful consequences. Purely temporal sequences of abstract sense structures ((a.) *Middle Ages* → *Enlightenment* → *modernity*; (b.) *sixteenth century* → *eighteenth century* → *new times*; *previous epoch* → *new times*; **past** → **present** → **future**; (c.) **tradition** → **modern**) are reinforced by categories that coordinate them as indispensable consequences. These categorical coordinators are figures of speech invested in the heterogeneous flux of phenomena to make them make sense. In these examples they signify 'process'. That already implies meaningful intention and eventual finality ((a.) **transformation** → **shaping** → **particular product** → **every aspect affected**; (b.) **course** → **process** → **emergence** → **final[ity]** → **seeds**; (c.) **usable tradition** → **contemporary** life). Here too historicism finds it *impossible to imagine* any change in what occasions change.

But this historicist assessment of the Enlightenment only confirms its redundancy. *First*, in the historicist sequences it itself supplied to start with, it addresses itself. No more information can intrude into its already predetermined scheme than it already comprehends. So however comprehensive the history of the Enlightenment claims to be, it leaves readers no more enlightened than at the outset.

Historians default to the fallacious assumption that what happened precedes its narrative description. However, the narrative defines what happens. What happens cannot define itself; without a witness or testimony what happens is unknown. Narrative is a basic means of ordering information, of judging truth and falsehood. It also, therefore, motivates action, creates reality, precisely because its discursive coherence is fictional and grammatological: that also makes it dangerous (cf. Faye 2009: 32). Further, directly connected to the material basis of society, narrative is not just the common form in which history presents itself, but the means for generating history, for suggesting what might happen next. The narrator is, therefore, by definition 'in the know'.

The capacity to narrate affirms the narrator's cognitive authority. The historian exemplifies both this capacity for 'knowing' and its authority: '[H]istory is the narration that knows about itself' [*L'histoire, c'est cette narration qui se sait*] (cf. Faye 2009: 192). Based on this dual function history both narrates reality and creates it on its own terms through narration. The historian both places the Enlightenment within a narrative sequence and asserts through categorical coordinators its importance for the world the historical narrative has created. History's redundancy is a precondition of its persuasiveness.

Second, the historicist structure aligning the twenty-first and the eighteenth centuries actually collapses the temporal 'distance' between them. Historically speaking, it precludes the nineteenth century, – a regrettable fault not because it might form another temporal 'connection' between the Enlightenment and now, but because it blocks further evaluations. Expressing also the historical unconscious which surfaces afterwards, these further values would extend the Enlightenment's diverse potential, thereby enlarging the scope of Modernity, the Modernity informing sophisticated historicism.

β. *Historical continuity and historicist sense* need a long 'stretch' of time to disclose the sameness underlying ostensible difference. Historicism needs it for affirming its transcendental sense. And yet no historian really knows how historically 'close' to, or 'distant' from, the Enlightenment the modern world is. The problem is sophisticated, its solution undecidable: what could be its contemporary reference-point? Certainly the Enlightenment differentiates itself from the Middle Ages, but it also pervades contemporary society. But this is a technical academic judgement based on its own categorically coordinated structures. Further, it discounts the humanistic coefficient. The question should rather attempt to define how or where the Enlightenment figures within the world constituting, and constituted by, individual consciousness, by personal life-experience.

Historicism is, therefore, sophisticated when, as academic orthodoxy, it assimilates the future the Enlightenment conjectured, configured as Modernity, to the present day, taken as the Enlightenment's purpose. But this professional conceit disintegrates. The Enlightenment could not imagine today's world some three centuries ahead of it. Its conception of its future is a 'past future' (to use Reinhart Koselleck's term), an unrealized possibility. The historicism that would construe Modernity as a consequence of Enlightenment is futile. Certainly (as Alfred Whitehead argues) 'the future is immanent in the present by reason of the fact that the present bears in its own essence the relationships it will have to the future', and with them 'the necessities to which the future must conform'. In other words, the Enlightenment in its own time had immanent in it, for itself, its conception of the future, as (what Whitehead calls) 'an object for prehension in the subjective immediacy of the present'. Hence, it could 'impose on the particular future which must succeed it' a future now long since lost, unrealized. Further, Whitehead stresses what historicism disregards: that 'the objective existence of the future in the present differs from the objective existence of the past in the present. The various particular occasions of the past are in existence, and are severally functioning

as objects of prehension in the present'. By contrast, 'there are no actual occasions in the future already constituted. Thus there are no actual occasions in the future to exercise efficient causation in the present. What is objective in the present is the necessity of a future of actual occasions, and the necessity that these future occasions conform to the conditions inherent in the essence of the present occasion'. And he adds, 'there is complete contemporary freedom. *It is not true that whatever happens is immediately a condition laid upon everything else*' (Whitehead 1967b: 194–5, 198 (my italics)). The professional sophism of academic history is to regard current Modernity as just such an (actually impossible) occasion in the Enlightenment's future reconstructed by means of a historicist 'process' that necessarily coordinates them. Conversely, it discloses the Enlightenment's own (now historicized) present as its indisputable historical 'context' integral to the self-same historicist 'process'.

By contrast, since the Enlightenment does figure within the world constituting, and constituted by, individual consciousness and if it is 'indeed, *impossible to imagine* any aspect of **contemporary** life in the West without it', this historicist scaffolding is superfluous (cf. Pagden 2013: 345). Already a field of heterogeneous facts and asynchronous values, the Enlightenment is absorbed into other fields of heterogeneity and asynchronicity, other varieties of literary and philosophical discourse that together define themselves as culture. For example, books the authorities destroyed or banned, that meant exile or prison for their authors, are now available in various forms: scholarly editions, relatively inexpensive, philologically validated paperback formats, or in modern reprographic facsimiles or in digital form. Certainly, many of these works have become classics with even the then very radical assimilated to affirmative culture now. That is no historical judgement, rather recognition of them distinguishing themselves from the surrounding heterogeneity and asynchronicity, – their prominence being less an expression of accumulated symbolic capital than an immediate existential resource (cf. Davies 2016b: 20).

(c.) As in the examples already cited, the historicist necessity to align the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries is flawed, the transference between them unenlightening. Hence its sophistical character. The historicist structures of continuity are illusory. No past 'epoch' can conceive the arrangement of consequences later historians will construct for it or the future anticipated by historicist continuity. Historicist 'context' and self-projecting future inevitably diverge. Conversely, the Enlightenment offers an indispensable landmark for contemporary thought. That suggests it is quite assimilated to it.

Ironically, its extensive historiography actually affirms the Enlightenment's cultural presence. It bulks it up: anything bulky imposes itself. It itself creates the conditions for it to 'matter'. So this historicist preconception pre-emptively maps out its current scope and relevance. The same historicist thinking that regards the Enlightenment as pervasive in contemporary culture, that sees Modernity as its final goal, cannot relinquish it in its historicized form. Further the sophistical continuity it depends on needs to ignore the heterogeneous

and asynchronous character of modern culture. That stops it realizing that historicism itself is no more than a contingent coordination of some of its components. The result is a compromising paradox. Even if the Enlightenment does pervade all aspects of contemporary life in the West and, through its contemporaneity, can be understood as Modernity, it must still be historicized, – and not for the sake of the Enlightenment but for the sake of historicism. So historicized is the world: cultural cognition automatically defaults to historicization. Historicizing whatever happens in order to comprehend it has become so involuntary, so habitual. The truth it fabricates is instinctively conventional. It is self-evident that history – ultimately the historicizing reflex – needs the Enlightenment much more than the Enlightenment, already pervasive in contemporary life, needs it.

To attempt to block this typically Modernist rupture within itself historicism defaults to predictable sophisticated strategies:

α. Historicism resorts to categorical coordinators that have a stabilizing effect. They acknowledge change but affirm continuity. These are typically ‘threshold’, ‘bequest’, ‘heir’, ‘legacy’ (cf. Davies 2016a: 94, 105ff.). They transform the sequential relationship between the Enlightenment and Modernity into consequential necessity. So, apparently, ‘the Enlightenment stands at the *threshold* of the modern age’ (Schmidt 1996: xi); similarly ‘Hume [...] more decisively than many of his brethren in the Enlightenment, stands at the *threshold* of modernity and exhibits its risks and its possibilities’ (Gay 1995: 419). It comes as a bequest: ‘Far from being a project single-mindedly aimed at the goal of modernity, [...] the Enlightenment is more accurately understood as a cultural experience defined first and foremost [...] by the values it has *bequeathed* us’ (Ferrone 2015: 172). Enlightenment and Modernity are thus construed as reciprocal: on the one hand, ‘the key terms of almost every modern conflict over how we are to [...] understand humanity [...] ultimately *refer back* to some understanding of the Enlightenment’; on the other, ‘we are all, *inescapably*, the *heirs* of the architects of the Enlightenment “science of man”’ (Pagden 2013: 5, 351 (my emphasis)).

β. The same coordinators can also dissociate the Enlightenment’s essentially unchanging identity (in the past) from its contemporary resonance. So the historian’s task is to ‘rethink the historical experience as a whole [...] keeping well in mind [...] the ever more urgent need to clarify its authentic meaning in the face of repeated attempts to manipulate and obfuscate it that have taken place in the *course* of the *centuries* down to our own time’. He aims to ‘distinguish with *true intellectual honesty* and *philological rigor* between the specific historical identity of the eighteenth-century phenomenon and its *legacy in the following centuries, down to our own times*’ (Ferrone 2015: xiv, 57 (my italics)). That is to say, this task means ‘examining controversies in detail’, since this ‘provides a means of testing possible answers to the most pertinent questions *objective* to the *historical process* itself, enabling us to see what was most discussed [...]. As a methodology it employs the *general historical process* itself to locate the key ideas of the time and *sift out those superimposed*

as “key” by later schools of thought, and historians’ (Israel 2006: 25 (my italics)). Certainly, this strategy blocks both what Ferrone calls ideological philosophical interpretations of the Enlightenment and any recognition of modern heterogeneity and asynchronicity in the Enlightenment. Even so this strategy is flawed by its historicist preconceptions. How does anyone know that a given ‘age’ expresses itself fully, even exhausts itself, in its ‘own age’? So, therefore, how does anyone know that the ‘identity’ of an ‘age’ reflects its ‘age’? In historicist comprehension ‘age’ is a very vague but, therefore, most effective coordinator. Moreover, defining the identity of an age only makes sense if it is connected categorically as a ‘legacy’ or through a ‘historical process’ or ‘course of centuries’ with the present. If not, the objective stance transforms it into a historical self-ideal, an *objet d’art*, the focus of scholastic connoisseurship.

γ. The fail-safe strategy of historical comprehension is its automatic recourse to ‘context’, – a powerful, apparently unchallengeable categorical coordinator. Here it means ‘political events, social tensions, legal processes, economic developments, material and aesthetic culture, and educational institutions’. The ‘controversialist’ method describes ‘a procedure, starting from the vantage point of general history, to determine what the political, social, and cultural context of a given controversy is and how the controversy’s course is shaped by political, legal, ecclesiastical, academic, and popular interventions’ (Israel 2013: 32–3). Most effectively it blocks any sense of a heterogeneous and asynchronous Modernity by investing in it the self-same sense it proposes to derive from it. It adopts the commanding monographic overview that distributes the varieties of human experience amongst its institutionalized disciplinary categories according to the historian’s own technical interest.

These strategies, however, demonstrate that historicism cannot live up to its self-ideal. Its premises are deceptive. What entitles history alone to assert itself as authenticity, when any discipline could make the same assessment about itself? Why does ‘clarification’ automatically posit the Enlightenment’s subsequent reception as ‘manipulation’ and ‘obfuscation’? Why does contextual definition mean ‘sifting out’ ideas superimposed by later schools of thought? The refusal here to acknowledge heterogeneity and asynchronicity is conceptually impoverishing. Surely the significance of an idea can be gauged only by the extent of its ramifications, by the affinities it stimulates? In any case (Deleuze and Guattari assert) philosophical thought is not constrained by historical context. Ideas do not die: they leave no ‘legacy’, they just hibernate, emerging in different surroundings, provocative for being out of season [*unzeitgemäß*]. The fate of the Enlightenment suggests that historicist comprehension hardly comes close to exemplifying the ‘intellectual honesty and philological rigor’ it claims for itself. Rather, it is a mess of tautologies and contradictions. Historicism may well treat present Modernity as an at least ‘provisional *telos*’ of the Enlightenment. Ironically, though, the Enlightenment achieves nothing like its projected self-realization. Instead, it reveals the redundancy of the historicist thought-style pre-destined to take it there. Historicization goes on

compelled by its momentum long after its self-justification disintegrates – a typically modern syndrome.

(d.) In his 1784 essay defining the Enlightenment, Kant calls ‘guardians’ [*Vormünder*] those professional experts – in this case: the pastor, the doctor, the army-officer, the cleric, the academic – who relieve people of the ‘irksome business’ of needing to think about how to conduct their life. For Kant their influence is nefarious. They keep the public in a state of tutelage. They ensure it mouths their thoughts. And, worst of all and quite contrary to human interests, as in the case of clerics with their dogmatic orthodoxy, they pre-empt the thinking and ethos of future ages. So persuasive are these guardians: they deprive the public of both their freedom of thought and their confidence to exercise it in public. For Kant this situation blocks Enlightenment: personal freedom and the public use of reason otherwise suffice for the public to enlighten itself (Kant 1982b: 54–5).

The guardians’ social function resembles in some respects the Sophists’ Plato analyses in *Protagoras*. Kant’s essay echoes Plato’s dialogue, not least because his cognitive stance, like Socrates’, is partly sophistical (as a public teacher, a professor of philosophy) and partly philosophical (analysing concepts). According to *Protagoras*, the Sophists commodify knowledge to sell it to the public. In doing so they influence peoples’ minds irrespective of whether or not it really benefits them (Plato 1999: 107–9; 313C–314B). The dialectical exposition turns on the question whether or not virtue can be taught. Significant as a basic moral and intellectual value, it makes the question crucial. Its teaching cannot be left to the ‘generality’ of Sophists who ‘maltreat the young; for when they have escaped the arts, they bring them back against their will and force them into arts, teaching them arithmetic and astronomy and geometry and music’ (Plato 1999: 123–5; 318D–319). Neither can it be consigned to general education where children are admonished by teachers and family ‘from earliest childhood to the last day of their lives’ nor to the city which imposes its own normative laws and behaviour (Plato 1999: 143–5; 325D–326D). Thus throughout his life, the pedagogic, cultural, and political authorities treat the individual in their charge ‘as a bent and twisted piece of wood and straighten him with threats and blows’ (ibid.).⁵ Opposing this social imposition of intellectual and moral conformity, Protagoras ‘undertakes to make men good citizens’. For his pupil ‘learning consists of good judgement in his own affairs, showing how best to order his own home; and in the affairs of his city, showing how he may have most influence on public affairs both in speech and in action’ (Plato 1999: 125; 318E). In the end Socrates comes round to Protagoras’s view that virtue can be taught. However he desires to discuss it not by his sophistical recourse to myth and poetry, but philosophically, ‘as men of culture, who prefer to converse directly with each other, and to use their own way of speech in putting one another by turns to the test’. His aim is for himself and his companions to ‘hold [their] discussion together in [their] own persons, making trial of the truth and themselves’ (Plato 1999: 213; 347E–348).

Evidently both Kant's essay and Plato's dialogue differentiate between accepted, commodified knowledge and the cultivation of personal judgement through thinking for oneself tested in public discussion, between politically affirmative erudition and personally validated truth. By contrast, the sophism of the guardians, of the professional experts, assimilates personal judgement and truth-values to commodified knowledge, knowledge already known, affirmative erudition. It is a cognitive stance that sustains technocratic culture in general, along with its defining characteristics: academic convention, disciplinary orthodoxy, professional expertise, and scholastic connoisseurship. In particular it also sustains historicism, the automatic habit to historicize a problem to explain it, a conceptually pre-emptive mental reflex.

The cognitive stance supporting Enlightenment historiography thus fails to support the Enlightenment itself. Being a historian of the Enlightenment convinced that 'it matters' does not automatically advance Enlightenment now. The identity principle that likens the Enlightenment to its history subverts it. By contrast the Enlightenment is here not imagined as a significant 'period' in a historicist scheme, as an object of technocratic analysis, an *objet d'art* for scholarly connoisseurship. Rather it signifies the existential challenge posed by its constitutive texts: to maintain a direct connection between knowledge and action, thinking and behaviour.

In coping with the enveloping culture of apprehension generated by fatal tendencies in the world, every intellectual stance counts. Either it offers clarification, or it further darkens dark times: no neutral position exists. If Enlightenment – as a concept – means improving the world, it would be senseless to compromise it by placing it in pre-emptively occlusive historicist schemes, to handicap it with normative judgements and preconceived evaluations, and so to prescribe how to think about it and to provide the pre-requisite discourse for it. It would be senseless – except that historicist thinking compels the historian to function as the most authoritative guardian.

(e.) Sophistical historicism is knowledge-management. It relies on two interdependent components: categorical coordinators offering a means of cataloguing the 'raw material' of events and supporting an administrative structure assessing their meaning and value; and the historian's cognitive attitude, the premises underlying the meaning and value it proposes. Both produce ambivalence. Sophistical historicism requires from the historian both interest in generating a narrative to produce historical meaning and assess its value and distanciation to evaluate the performativity of this construction within its larger historicist scheme. These pre-conceptions leave the Enlightenment compromised, as a cultural form inducing ambivalence, provoking historians' admiration and regret. But any sophistical historicist scheme diminishes the Enlightenment's effectiveness. If they are to survive ideas need their advocates' uncompromising commitment. But intellectual commitment to Enlightenment ideas clashes with historians' countervailing commitment to their own comprehensively historicized gaze. Inevitably this encounters opposition from those supporting what Voltaire called the 'party of humanity'.

Due to the historicist presumption of historical continuity, the present day regards itself as the Enlightenment's direct descendant. What characterizes this continuity, as a specifically dynamic historicist structure, is its representation as 'process', a most persuasive categorical coordinator. Once this cognitive structure captures the Enlightenment certain consequences follow. Enlightenment may well be a 'process', but 'processes' can fail: if the Enlightenment-as-process falters, the Enlightenment itself as a concept, whatever it was, whatever it might yet have been conceptually, is inevitably compromised. Further, and still from a perspective afforded by the historicist structure and its categorical coordinators, if the Enlightenment-as-process suggests an inherent flaw in the Enlightenment as it was conceptually in its own 'era', then its value as a 'bequest' or 'legacy' declines. If it should fail, rendering continuity questionable, the 'process' is left exposing the Enlightenment as almost irrelevant for the present, unless it be as an *objet d'art*, still appreciated by scholastic connoisseurship typically inclined to amplify the significance of anything.

The task of sophisticated historicism is, therefore, to negotiate the ambivalence induced in the historian by its self-serving cognitive strategies. The following formulations typify this syndrome:

- (a.) Allegedly, 'a *process* was set in train in the late eighteenth century, a democratic Enlightenment based on liberty, equality, and the "general good", which was *then arrested* by kings, aristocracy, and Robespierre's Counter-Enlightenment and *driven back*, but which *resumed* **after a fashion** in the post-Second World War era'. However, '**another way of looking** at the Radical Enlightenment's **defeat** is to see it as a **temporary and partial setback** mainly due to the power of the Counter-Enlightenment, faith, and vested interests'. In 'today's fundamentalism, anti-secularism, Neo-Burkeanism, Postmodernism, and blatant unwillingness to clamp down on powerful vested interests' a comparable resistance persists. So 'it is at least **conceivable** that the universalism and social democracy of radical thought **might advance again**', even though 'there are **few grounds for optimism**'. In conclusion, therefore, 'it is intriguing to think that the programme of the radical *philosophes* [italics J.I.I] **could perhaps be completed yet**' (Israel 2013: 951 (my emphasis)).
- (b.) So 'the **benefit** of two centuries' hindsight' exposes 'the **large gap** that exists between Enlightenment **ideals** and contemporary **realities**'. It reveals 'our **present** world [as] both **similar to** and **different from** the world they [i.e. 'Enlightenment intellectuals'] wanted', since 'the ideals of the Enlightenment still elude us' (Louden 2010: vii, 6–7).
- (c.) So too the political and economic organization of the world since 1945 might well derive from the Enlightenment, but, since the world is still 'populated by [...] very far from enlightened regimes, **this may not be very much**' (Pagden 2013: xiii (my emphasis)). Hence, '**central Enlightenment beliefs** in a common humanity' that goes beyond 'the community, family, parish, or patria', are still '**shakily primitive and**

incomplete', though less so – apparently – than 'even fifty years ago' (Pagden 2013: 349 (my emphasis)). Hence, too, 'cosmopolitan institutions' representing international law and 'not utterly unlike **the kind that Kant had hoped for**' are 'admittedly somewhat **ramshackle**, often **ineffective**', so that 'the world of communicating human beings which Kant saw as providing the basis for any future cosmopolitan world may *still be some way off*' – even if, apparently, '*far closer today*' than in 1945 (Pagden 2013: 350 (my emphasis)).

- (d.) The Enlightenment 'is more accurately understood as a cultural experience defined first and foremost (and this **probably** remains so to this day) by the values it has bequeathed us. It is a *laboratory of modernity* [italics V.F.], a *process that may have stalled at times* but that was *never entirely suppressed*, nor ever brought to a *conclusion* once and for all' (Ferrone 2015: 172 (my emphasis)).

Common to these different formulations from different perspectives is a similar discourse expressing a similar ambivalence. To construct continuity as 'process' centred on the Enlightenment-as-process is a cognitive liability: the metaphor 'process' offers a coherent purpose reality cannot support. Hence a recurrent temporal pattern: (a.) a *process* → *set in train* → *then arrested* → *driven back* → *resumed*; (c.) Kant's cosmopolitan world is both *some way off* and *far closer today*; (d.) a *process* → *stalled at times* → *never entirely suppressed* → nor brought to a *conclusion*. These terms in each case are self-cancelling: a 'process' that is *arrested* or *stalls at times* stops being a 'process'; whatever is both *way off* and *far closer* is indeterminate, a self-contradiction. Instead, such formulations are meant to deny what is immediately self-evident: the fractured landscape of Modernity.

Further, as a means of academic exculpation these formulations convert the fallibility of the historicist structure (cf. 'process') into flaws in the Enlightenment as concept. Hence (a.) the Enlightenment persists **after a fashion; another way of looking** sees **defeat** as a **temporary and partial setback**; (b.) history offers a **benefit** that exposes in the Enlightenment the **large gap** that exists between its **ideals** and contemporary **realities**; (c.) the world's current organization may derive from the Enlightenment, but this is inadequate: **this may not be very much; central Enlightenment beliefs** are still **shakily primitive and incomplete**; Kant's cosmopolitan institutions now seem somewhat **ramshackle**, often **ineffective**. Then, in their turn, these conceptual flaws in the Enlightenment validate the ambivalence of its historicist reconstruction.

(f.) Underlying Enlightenment historiography are historians' evaluations of the Enlightenment's conceptual integrity and its present significance. Confirming their superior knowledge these cardinal functions vindicate historians' 'guardian-status'. They ratify their authority to remind the public what it should know and think. In the Enlightenment's case, however, ambivalence compromises them. Symptomatic is their recourse to tentative expressions, to qualification, indecision, hypothesis, speculation: (a.) **after a fashion; another way**

of looking; conceivable; might advance; few grounds; could perhaps be; (b.) the **present** world both **similar to** and **different from** (the world of the Enlightenment); (c.) **may not be very much;** (d.) **probably** remains so; *may have stalled; never entirely suppressed.*

Sophistical historicism sees the Enlightenment as dysfunctional. The Enlightenment fails to warrant the prestige academic professionalism in its self-interest invests in it. But what appears obvious can be illusory. The ambivalence it induces reveals a flaw in the scholarship rather than in its object. Construing historical continuity as a ‘process’ confirms more than just the historicist reliance on categorical coordinators. Rather, Hannah Arendt argues, ‘what the concept of process implies is that the concrete and the general, the single thing or event and the universal have parted company’. This means that ‘the process, which alone makes meaningful whatever it happens to carry along, has thus acquired a monopoly of universality and significance’ (Arendt 1993: 64). It means too that, however significant it might become, the Enlightenment will never be more significant than the historicist process behind it. If comprehension by its ambivalent academic apologists solely defined the Enlightenment, it itself would decline.

In this situation the Enlightenment proves enlightening by exposing the ambivalence of the academic standpoint and the professional conceit behind it. If gaining knowledge and understanding affirms a more enlightened world, then the academic specialists producing it see themselves *ipso facto* as promoting Enlightenment. They must be its current avatar, – intending to clarify it, to define what it was, to place it in its own ‘context’. They situate themselves within the history they conceive: for them ‘as an intellectual movement’ the Enlightenment ‘saw the beginning of those academic *disciplines* – economics, sociology, political science, and certain kinds of moral philosophy – which *dictate* much of how we *view*, and attempt to *control* our lives today’ (Pagden 2013: viii (my italics)). The Enlightenment’s ‘crucial significance’, thus defined, provides a model for ‘anyone wishing to live in accord with reason’, since it already informs what (allegedly) ‘most educated people’ accept and believe. Thus the historicist consensus, reinforced by disciplinary authority and academic correction, surreptitiously exerts social and intellectual control: that ‘most educated people’ should recognize ‘what the present owes to the past’, and, absorbed in the reiterated interpretation of the same, align their thinking accordingly (Israel 2013: 1; 2006: v; Pagden 2013: xiv, 343–4; cf. Popper 1957: 53–4 (my italics)). The very discourse that would promote the Enlightenment and its intellectual autonomy actually comes down to affirming the intellectual authoritarianism (cf. ‘*disciplines*’, ‘*dictate* [...] view’, ‘*control* [...] lives’) that defines the stance of academic expertise, that in particular affirms the historian in his or her public ‘guardian’ function. It demonstrates that for their cultural presence historians need the Enlightenment more than the Enlightenment conceptually needs them. Operating on the margins of nihilism, sifting through heterogeneous matters that negate any conspicuous value, history must constantly confront what its sense is worth. No wonder then that in a hopelessly historicized

world academic self-identification with the Enlightenment is symptomatic of a narcissistic cultural trend: the historian typically 'escapes the painful feeling of nothingness by molding himself in fancy into something outstanding' (Horney 1966: 92). Construed here as social and cultural norms (and implying repression), being 'educated', living 'in accord with reason', are not the Enlightenment's indisputable 'legacy': Enlightenment means criticizing, if not defying, prevailing norms.

(g.) Whether in the naïve form affirmed then by the *philosophes* or in its sophistical form constructed now by present-day historian 'guardians', historicism is deceptive. A crucial passage in Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) blocks them both. It is about the scope of human consciousness, about cognitive certainty.

With characteristic lucidity Spinoza dismantles both forms of historicism. Certainty, hence adequate knowledge (he argues), is not achievable in the present, unless under the species of eternity it discloses to the mind guided by reason a perspective beyond it. From this perspective the mind transcends time: true knowledge, specifically about good and evil, 'is only abstract, or universal' (that is, meta-historical) (Spinoza 1996: 149, P62). The mind in this divine situation treats an idea pertaining to the past, the present, and the future 'with the same necessity and [...] the same certainty' (ibid.). Whether it concerns the past or the future, the idea thus conceived 'will be equally true' and 'always have the same properties of an adequate idea' (ibid.). Conversely, any idea of anything time produces (that is, by its duration) is necessarily inadequate, because purely imaginative (ibid.) Through an inference that deftly refutes all teleological conceptions of history, Spinoza demonstrates why knowledge of ideas conceived as duration must be inadequate. He points out that if such ideas were to be adequate, orientation towards a future good would mean neglecting a comparatively imperfect present: '[T]he mind would want the good it conceived as future just as it wants the good it perceives as present' (ibid.). 'Hence', he adds, 'it would necessarily neglect a lesser present good for a greater future one, and what would be good in the present, but the cause of some future ill, it would not want at all' (ibid.). Ideas conceived as duration, as historically contingent, would intellectually and ethically disorientate individual behaviour. They would cause a break between the individual's actions and his or her understanding of them. They contribute to the apprehensive state of human existence in a historicized world.

Spinoza restricts the scope of ideas formulated in terms of temporal duration. He limits the validity of historical knowledge. Ideas that develop through duration (i.e. as 'process', 'legacy', or 'bequest') derive from a lesser faculty, the imagination, the very source of uncertainty, of both fantasy and apprehension. Hence the conclusion that 'we can have only a quite inadequate knowledge of the duration of things, and we determine their times of existing only by the imagination, which is not equally affected by the image of a present thing and the image of a future one' (Spinoza 1996: 149, P62). Hence, too, his assertion that 'the judgment we make concerning the order of things and the connection of causes, so that we may be able to determine what in the present

is good or evil for us, is imaginary rather than real' (ibid.). It destroys the cognitive validity of sophisticated historicism, thereby enabling the Enlightenment to defend itself against it. Historians' claim to a moral, humanistic purpose in writing history, in producing its comprehensive objectivity by disclosing its autochthonous order, and thus pretending historical truth offers adequate knowledge is annulled. Driven by imagination, the factual amplification of any given moment fails to grasp its meaning in a heterogeneous, insecure world.

The species of eternity may well discount sophisticated historicism as imaginary; the present moment offers naïve historicism an opportunity for self-realization. Rather than conforming to a retrospectively justified historical law, it seizes on this moment to clarify its cognitive intentions. 'Progression' is not the unfolding of a project preconceived as duration, but rather an acknowledgement of *durée*, that (as Spinoza acknowledged) it simply takes time and perseverance to develop knowledge that might yet be timeless. In this endeavour the Enlightenment is supported by the present, its presence conjoining its precursors and its posterity. For it as for Aristotle the present 'now' is never in time but always both a hiatus between before and after and the basis of continuity (cf. Aristotle 1996a: 373–5, 389, 391; 218a, 219b, 220a). As such the present invites self-renewal, – as Carlyle confirms: 'The Present Time, youngest-born of Eternity, child and heir of all the Past Times with their good and evil, and parent of all the Future, is ever a "New Era" to the thinking man; and comes with new questions and significance, however commonplace it look: to know *it*, and what it bids us do, is ever the sum of knowledge for all of us' (Carlyle n.d.b: 259).

That the Enlightenment offers 'new significance' is evident in Kant's essay on the question of the Enlightenment. Without precedent (as Michel Foucault argues), in this essay philosophy reflects on the age, the philosopher on his situation in it. The presence of the Enlightenment signifies for the public both an exit [*Ausgang*] from intellectual deference towards its official guardians and a means of reclaiming intellectual autonomy (Kant 1982b: 53). Modernity is not a 'bequest' or 'legacy' from the Enlightenment delivered by a sophisticated historicist world-mechanism, but rather an attitude towards the present that, far from despising it for its ephemerality, recognizes in it its unique veracity (cf. Foucault 2001: 1388). Thus the Enlightenment blocks any attempt to slot it into a comprehensive sophisticated historicist scheme. Precisely its reflection on its own present offers resistance towards historical norms and limits and their abstract values (e.g. humanism). It means challenging them rather than conceding to them.

Sophisticated historicism proposes a goal that assimilates individual action to its transcendental scheme (as, e.g. in the case of Schelling, Hegel, or Droysen). Conversely, naïve historicism requires cognitive autonomy. It requires critical self-awareness because, sustaining the human species' well-being, it must be exercised in the present, now. Breaking down historically entrenched norms, specifically cognitive norms, habits, and conventions, daring to know and think for oneself enables the human species to find self-fulfilment. As a

subjective stance personal autonomy derives sense and value from the ethos of Modernity, from the synchronous heterogeneity of its asynchronous components and the concomitant disintegration of its values. Apart from this, ‘apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness’ (Whitehead 1985: 167).

5. Modernity as discontinuity

(a.) Naïve historicism deceives itself with its self-projection into the future; sophisticated historicism deludes itself with the conceit that the past appoints uniquely it as its guardian. Both historicist positions are fallible even if purely temporal duration permits present self-projection into the future or present self-identification with the past. However, from the standpoint of the conceptual or semantic field embracing both Modernity and Enlightenment such temporal self-projections or self-identifications invalidate themselves. Modernity is nothing but discontinuity, nothing but rupture.

Historicist comprehension fails. To see Modernity as a ‘bequest’ or ‘legacy’ from the Enlightenment, or to value the Enlightenment for historically affirming the present hardly reflects well on either. Reflecting on itself as a cultural concept, Modernity discovers its psychopathological condition: ‘the sick animal’ [*das kranke Tier*] identified by Max Scheler, the likelihood ‘that everyone is a little neurotic’ suggested by Freud – diagnoses not far from D’Holbach’s assertion that ‘all men are sick, birth immediately exposes them to the contagion of error’ [*tous les hommes sont malades, la naissance les livre aussitôt à la contagion de l’erreur*] (cf. Scheler 1955c: 184–5; Freud 1987: 218; D’Holbach 2008: 210; I, 16).

Both Modernity and the Enlightenment in their common conceptual field are subject to the fate of knowledge. ‘Fate’ here refers to the inevitable tension between the knowledge this field possesses about the world, what it knows about itself; and how it works, how it informs social and political behaviour. For the Enlightenment knowledge only had value if it enlightened. So, prejudicial to its value, this fatal diremption between knowing and acting needs to be identified: it resists resolution. But what fate awaits knowledge is inscrutable. Whether it will enlighten or incriminate: historicist projections are inadequate. As Spinoza suggests, current knowledge offers little guidance for constructing the future. As Montesquieu somewhat mischievously asserts, ‘treaties resulting from perpetual negotiation that contain clauses foreseeing what will not happen and never foreseeing what does happen only multiply occasions for rupture’ [*ne font que multiplier les occasions de rupture*] (Montesquieu 1949: 1428).

Modernity in general, like the Enlightenment in particular, is, therefore, vulnerable to cultural discontent and the psychopathology of historicized life. So, as evinced in the *philosophe*, the cognitive behaviour that mitigates this fatality for the Enlightenment, like Modernity, works as therapy. It is motivated by Cicero’s conviction that philosophy, an ‘efficacious medicine’, is a

‘physician of souls’ that ‘takes away the load of empty troubles’ and ‘sets us free from desires and banishes fears’ (Cicero 1996: 156–7, 392–3; II. iv. 11; IV. xxvii. 58). This situation could be managed only by the acquisition of more knowledge and by the self-improvement of the faculty of understanding. Human beings cannot influence the course of history. They cannot realize any plan for producing an inevitably future ‘better world’. But they can at least analyse that part of it empirically available to them: the ‘age’, the ‘times’, that narrow temporal span they happen to live in. They can identify its particular pathogenic character; they can attempt to remedy what ails it. As Gay points out: ‘Medecine had been linked to the scientific revolution – which was at bottom a philosophical revolution – from the beginning; the pioneers of that revolution saw themselves as physicians to a sick civilization’ (Gay 1979: 13).

For both Modernity and the Enlightenment time itself reveals what the world, hitherto unconsciously, has become. Rather it complements the realization that occurred to the *philosophes* (for example, Fontenelle and Voltaire) that personal existence or life-structure is itself a cognitive instrument. In Modernity ‘the age’ comes with a definite character experienced as symptomatic of a critical situation. Focussing on it is a trope of modern cultural criticism. This explores the cognitive situation in which it reveals its character; it sabotages the hitherto available knowledge the world has of itself. Modernity is experienced as apprehension, anxiety, and crisis: the available knowledge with its underlying conceptual complacency fails to cope with the cognitive shock of the temporally unsuspected, of crises of the unforeseen.

A response is inevitable, automatic. To become conscious of itself, the age must be surveyed, criticized, its discomfiting legacy explored, its indisposition diagnosed. But the ‘age’ is diffused into the texture of immediate existential circumstances. So any apprehension of them requires self-distanciation. This is achievable in several ways, each offering a kaleidoscopic re-arrangement of similar component elements. There is:

- The fiction of the foreigner whose own social and moral values challenge hitherto unquestionably dominant manners and customs – as in Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (1721) or Voltaire’s *L’Ingénu* (1767);
- The recourse to utopianism – as in Mercier’s *L’an 2440* [1771]) which, through the fictional device of a dream, shows how a rationally organized world would produce humanistic social behaviour;
- Or, conversely, as in Wilhelm Heinse’s *Ardinghello und die glückseligen Inseln* [*Ardinghello and the Blissful Isles*] (1787), which portrays an aesthetic and sensuous paradise that anticipates Nietzsche as much as it evokes an idealized Renaissance;
- The historical situation of the ‘age’: the cultural conflict between the Ancients and Moderns (described by Charles Perrault), the contrast between the ‘naïve’ poetry of Classical times and the ‘sentimental’ poetry that characterizes a modern self-conscious culture (identified by Friedrich Schiller);

- The Enlightenment itself a means of the ‘age’s self-reflection’, as when Kant defines it as ‘not an enlightened age’ but ‘an age of Enlightenment’, and then as ‘the actual age of criticism’ [*das eigentliche Zeitalter der Kritik*] to which everything must submit itself, thereby defining the cognitive strategy that drives modern knowledge (cf. Kant 1971: 7; A XI);
- The concern with the ‘social manners’ of the age: it informs implicitly much of the *philosophes*’ thinking but is epitomized in Charles Duclos’s *Considérations sur les mœurs de ce siècle* [*Considerations on the Manners of this Century*] (1751).

Moreover this diagnostic stance is a pervasive feature of Modernity as a ‘functional concept’. For confirmation it suffices to list even a random selection of its conceptually interrelated components:

- Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* [*Basic Features of the Present Age*] (1806);
- Thomas Carlyle, ‘Signs of the Times’ (1829); *Past and Present* (1843);
- Walther Rathenau, *Zur Kritik der Zeit* [*Towards a Critique of the Age*] (1912);
- Johan Huizinga, *Im Schatten von Morgen. Eine Diagnose des geistigen Leidens unserer Zeit* [*In the Shadow of Tomorrow. A Diagnosis of the Mental Suffering of Our Time*] (1935);
- Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* [*The Inheritance of this Time*] (1935);
- Christopher Caudwell, *Studies in a Dying Culture* (1938);
- Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of our Time. Wartime Essays of a Sociologist* (1943);
- Paul Valéry, *Regards sur le monde actuel* [*Perspectives on the Modern World*] (1945);
- Heinrich Mann, *Ein Zeitalter wird besichtigt* [*An Age Surveyed*] (1946);
- Jean-François Lyotard, *L’inhumain. Causeries sur le temps* [*The Inhuman. Talks on the Times*] (1988);
- Jacques Rancière, *Les temps modernes. Art, temps, politique* [*Modern Times. Art, Time, Politics*] (2018);
- Bridle, J., *New Dark Age. Technology and the End of the Future* (2018);
- Rob Riemen, *To Fight Against This Age. On Fascism and Humanism* (2018).

Each testifies to the indispensable need not just to know what is happening at a specific moment, not just to record and interpret it, but to see it as symptomatic of an underlying, hitherto unsuspected, far more menacing fatality. Together, in their arbitrariness, they suggest another fundamental – one might say – archaic tropism of apprehensive cultural behaviour, as evinced in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* envisaging an inevitable existential decline from a luxurious, divine golden age, via silver, brass, and heroic ages, to an age of iron in which ‘men never rest from labour and sorrow by day, and from perishing at night’ with the gods laying ‘sore trouble among them’, such that one would wish one ‘either had died before [it] or been born afterwards’ (Hesiod 1995: 11–17).

(b.) The 'age' draws attention to itself not just because no one has control of history, but because it is withdrawing itself from conceptual management and immediate comprehension. In a (self-styled) mechanistic age it is running dangerously out of control. Following Reinhart Koselleck historians talk of the 'acceleration of history' beginning with the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. But it involves something else: something new, the latest thing, the synchronous coincidence of the asynchronous heterogeneity of objects and values, and this in its turn produces discontinuity and rupture.

The predominant sign of historical time accelerating is the momentum of novelty, the unrelenting self-adjustment to the perpetual recurrence of the 'latest thing':

Commenting on the introduction of less ceremonial public executions, Samuel Johnson observes in 1783: 'The age is running mad after innovation; all the business of the world is to be done in a new way; men are to be hanged in a new way; Tyburn itself is not safe from the fury of innovation' (Boswell 1985: 1211; cf. Gay 1979: 9).

In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) Adam Smith directly relates acceleration to innovation. In the much-quoted example of manufacturing pins, the division of labour, the innovation, increases the quantity produced, the acceleration. As Smith remarks, the untrained worker alone might produce one pin per day. But with the manufacturing process broken down into 'eighteen distinct operations', ten men 'could, when they exerted themselves, make among them about twelve pounds of pins in a day', some forty-eight thousand pins in total, since some four thousand pins weigh a pound (Smith 1981: 14–15).

In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) Edmund Burke regards the Revolution as 'the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world' – and, not unsurprisingly, since his conservative view derived from a 'mixed system of opinion and sentiment' originating in 'antient chivalry', a principle evinced 'in a long succession of generations, even to the time we live in' (Burke 1982: 92, 170). Thus he confirms that historical continuity is a conservative, if not reactionary, cultural and political value. The rupture signifying Modernity confronts him as asynchronous heterogeneity, as 'out of nature', as a 'strange chaos of levity and ferocity, and of all sorts of crimes jumbled together with all sorts of follies'. And it comes with a heterogeneity compounded by its convergence with an unprecedented system of values, an age 'of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators' so that 'the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever' (ibid.).

Jules Michelet in the preface to the first volume of his *History of France* in 1872 remarks that 'one of the most serious, yet least observed of today's facts is that the pace of time has completely changed. It has doubled its pace in a strange manner. In a simple human life-span (usually seventy-two years) I have seen two great revolutions which long ago would perhaps have placed an interval of two thousand years between them'. In view of the momentous events occurring in his lifetime, from the Napoleonic Wars to the Franco-Prussian

War, he invites those who believe that the past contains the future and that history flows at an even pace, to reflect *here* that a century is often opposed to the century preceding it ‘and at times bitterly refutes it’ [*et lui donne parfois un âpre démenti*] (cf. Barthes 1954: 70–1).

(c.) As these comments by such different people suggest, acceleration of time manifests itself in the emergence of novelty. The moment when time accelerates through innovation constitutes a moment of discontinuity signified by rupture. Modernity is then a moment of historicization, when the past itself becomes a thing of the past, when it becomes cognitively redundant, when it drags a phase of history beneath the horizon of current consciousness, when it consigns a history to history – as, e.g. in 1793 with the introduction of a new, decimalized French Republican calendar to make a clean break with the precedent absolutism.

The Enlightenment signifies such a rupture, as Paul Hazard argues in *The European Mind 1680–1715*, first published in French in 1935. He focusses on the late seventeenth century to illustrate the foundations of what occurred between the Renaissance and the French Revolution. His explanation is encoded in the discourse of Modernity (as other illustrations below will confirm). ‘Never was there a greater contrast, never a more sudden transition than this!’, he exclaims: ‘A hierarchical system ensured by authority; life firmly based on dogmatic principle – such were the things held dear by the people of the seventeenth century; but these – controls, authority, dogmas, and the like – were the very things that their immediate successors of the eighteenth held in cordial detestation’. But ‘the change so abrupt and so decisive’ he is about to analyse seems more like rupture than transition however sudden: ‘[O]ne day, the French people, almost to a man, were thinking like Bossuet. The day after, they were thinking like Voltaire’. And he concludes with rupture in all but name: ‘No ordinary swing of the pendulum, that. It was a revolution’ (Hazard 1964: 7).

Heinrich Heine in his *Reisebilder* [*Travel Pictures*] articulates how exhilarating but also how disconcerting it is to live in modern times with their clamour for emancipation. In his ‘Harzreise’ [‘Journey to the Harz Mountains’] (1826) he registers his awareness that he is living ‘in times burdened with meaning’ [*in einer bedeutungsschweren Zeit*], times of literal rupture ‘when thousand year-old cathedrals are being demolished and imperial thrones consigned to the lumber-room’. In ‘Die Bäder von Lucca’ [The Baths of Lucca] (1830) he identifies his inner turmoil [*Zerrissenheit*] as a tear that rips the world apart: ‘[S]ince the poet’s heart is the central point of the world, it is no wonder that at present it is terribly conflicted [*jämmerlich zerrissen*]’. Consequently, ‘the great temporal fault-line of the world [*der große Weltriß*] goes right through his heart’ (Heine 1983: 40, 343).

Symptomatic of the apprehension historicization triggers is Péguy’s remark in 1913 that ‘the world [had] changed less since Jesus Christ than it [had] changed in the last thirty years’ [*Le monde a moins changé depuis Jésus-Christ qu’il n’a changé depuis trente ans*] (Péguy 1961: 1104). The change he identifies is the

obsolescence of traditional, popular French culture displaced by the formation of bourgeois society, – sustained by the technologically enhanced production and commerce generated by capitalism, affirming itself through the social and cultural ethos of liberalism, perpetuating itself with its dynamic of exponential change, modernization, and constant historicization.

This specific aspect is evident in a similarly historicizing response by the industrialist and politician Walther Rathenau in 1912 to the ‘mechanization of the world’ [*Mechanisierung der Welt*]. A rift [*Schnitt*] through the middle of the preceding, nineteenth century marks this transformation. It leaves ‘the old times, old-fashioned culture and the historical past on one side’ while on this side lie ‘our fathers, ourselves, new times [*Neuzeit*], the present’ (Rathenau 1918: 13). It induces apprehension. It is the premonition of a totally organized, bureaucratically monitored planet encased in a globalized scientific, economic, and political armature, supported by a world-wide information technology as the means to meet the needs of a rapidly increasing world-population. It is the very social structure for which the historical Enlightenment is reproached (cf. Davies 2016a: 33).

But above all Whitehead in 1933 exposes what he calls ‘the vicious assumption’ of continuity. He remarks that many current theories are derived from ‘an unbroken tradition of great thinkers and of practical examples, from the age of Plato in the fifth century before Christ to the end of the last century’. And he continues, ‘the whole of this tradition is warped by the vicious assumption that each generation will substantially live amid the conditions governing the lives of its fathers and will transmit those conditions to mould with equal force the lives of its children’. However, he adds, ‘we are living in the first period of human history for which this assumption is false’ (Whitehead 1967b: 92–3).

(d.) As Paul Valéry argued in his essay ‘Notre Destin et les Lettres’ [Our Destiny and Literature] (1937), ‘the mind has transformed the world and the world is taking its revenge’ [*L’esprit a transformé le monde et le monde le lui rend bien*] (Valéry 1960: 1059). Technology has ensured existential disorientation. It has accelerated the pace of life, increased its physiological potential, exceeded human comprehension, generated a climate of apprehension, and destroyed any precedents for anticipating the future. With great perspicacity he then proceeds to show how this modern situation affects the mind itself. He realizes that a world created by the mind becomes unmanageable because the mind cannot work beyond its current thinking. Valéry’s essay wrecks the very principle of an anthropocentric culture. The idea that truth derives from ‘Man’ being studied by ‘Mankind’ proves to be an illusion. If Modernity connotes discontinuity and rupture, it occurs within cognitive behaviour itself, – in the basic human capacity for self-orientation.

In one sense it is self-evident. If ‘Mankind’ did not study ‘Man’, who or what else would? So this proposition does apparently fulfil crucial principles of truth. It confirms the mind as adequate for studying its objects. It is justified by the principle of sufficient reason: that the object of study has itself an ultimately intelligible structure human beings with their knowledge (academics,

technicians, scientists) will eventually discern. This proposition also implies more generally that human beings have intelligence adequate for solving existential problems – political, social, and economic injustices – it has caused for itself.⁶ Further, it is no wonder ‘Man’ and ‘Mankind’ work as universal values: they provide stability and purpose to the pursuit of knowledge. However, they are also the ultimate categorical coordinators: they underlie an absolutely comprehensive discourse. But precisely because of this function they are susceptible to the greatest discontinuity Modernity offers: the mind being inadequate for solving the existential problems it created. As the issues of global warming and environmental destruction demonstrate, it is not ‘Man’ now ‘set [...] to subdue nature to his higher ends’ (as Huxley advocated) but Nature enforcing on Mankind compliance with *its* ends. As much in the case of cosmology as in medicine – sciences that fascinated the Enlightenment – truth defines what for scientists (still) remains unfathomed.

Rather both Modernity and the Enlightenment discover that rupture, heterogeneity, asynchronicity, the latest things, are the basis of knowledge and not the antiseptic, normative premises of technical disciplinary knowledge. Where ‘Man’ is the basis of knowledge it becomes uncertain. ‘Man’ suggests a constant but also consistent mutability, hence theoretically successive change but also in a pathogenic culture change as pragmatic rupture. Behind the ruptures and the heterogeneity of facts and values and their struggle for validity is (as Nietzsche suggested) nihilism. Nothing decides between them; nothing resolves their disagreements. The historical-temporal discontinuity and rupture reveal a structural discontinuity and rupture inherent in the basic cognitive situation itself. The Enlightenment and Modernity in general might well have viewed adequacy and sufficient reason as aptitudes constitutive of their knowledge, as appropriate for the ‘age of criticism’. But they end up confronting in a complementary dimension of their conceptual field a further apprehension: that ‘the world [...] is not complicit in our knowledge’ [*le monde [...] n’est pas complice de notre connaissance*] (Foucault 1971: 55). Henceforth ‘Man’ expresses the intellectual inadequacy, the insufficiency of reason, for managing a world human intelligence manufactured. This is the fate to which Enlightenment knowledge succumbs.

Notes

- 1 The German ‘Gleichgültigkeit’ is closer to ‘heterogeneity’ than the English ‘indifference’, its usual translation. ‘Gleich’ ‘gültig’ means ‘equally valid’: everything has the same validity: everything is as valid as anything else. (This could be a slogan for what has recently been called the ‘post truth’ or ‘post fact’ culture.) It offers confirmation of nihilism, in Nietzsche’s ‘most extreme’ sense: that any sense of truth is false because no world of truth actually exists. It is just the product of a narrow mental perspective, of ‘Man’ promoting itself as the meaning and truth of everything (Nietzsche 1996: 16–17). This may seem pessimistic, even though it opens a new prospect on the world, a new dimension to experience. The converse is worse. Each belief-system bases its validity on its truth. Religious pluralism is actually *mauvaise foi* since different belief-systems must be mutually exclusive. Still, it works: it works since its proponents agree to disregard its basic

untruth. If they do not, the result is conflict, brutality, and mutual extermination: nihilism as a bid for the others' non-existence.

- 2 For a critique of Böhme and Böhme 1985, see Habermas 1985: 352ff. Habermas' historicist perspective, though, focusses on the critique of reason predominant in the discourse of Modernity. It seems to avoid Modernity's symptomatic psychopathology.
- 3 Modern technical knowledge is received and disseminated. It is meant to save time or, in helping its user to be more productive, to make time more performative. That only widens the discrepancy between technical efficiency and the physical and mental limits of the human biology, as well as between innovative know-how and social convention and cultural habit. It is itself historicizing, which makes the immediate past seem historically remote. It, therefore, enforces history-focussed behaviour: its latest thing affirms the supersession of its precursor.
- 4 *Imprisoned by History* and *How History Works* contain a more detailed discussion (cf. Davies 2010: *passim*; 2016: 90ff.).
- 5 Kant refers to this metaphor of Man as 'crooked timber' in his essay on cosmopolitan history (cf. Kant 1982a: 41; §6).
- 6 This seems to be the principle supporting Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now. The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (2018).

3 The Enlightenment and the fate of knowledge

1. Defining the intellectual-function

(a.) Intellectuals evaluate the use of knowledge. They watch over its fate, trace fluctuations in its value. It is their responsibility, – all the more so since universities (that might have assumed this task) have declined into bureaucracies of sophistry, marketing trending thought-conventions on an industrial scale. In the specific case of the Enlightenment this responsibility is indispensable. The social-historical and cultural-historical disciplines that evaluate the Enlightenment derive, so their professional practitioners say, from the Enlightenment itself. Consequently the social or cultural historian has the self-indulgent pleasure of evaluating the Enlightenment by means of criteria that feed his or her professional interests as much as the Enlightenment's. Further, the authoritative historian might well conclude that the Enlightenment was a 'flawed performance' [*Fehlleistung*], either failing to realize its values or pushing values that proved catastrophic. Scholastic equivocation serves no one except scholars themselves. With it they produce and dissipate heterogeneous 'Enlightenments'. Any flaws in the post-Enlightenment world can supposedly be resolved piecemeal by clever problem-solving (cf. Pinker 2018: *passim*). Conversely, it takes substantial commitment, a pragmatist dedication, to explore the Enlightenment's critical motivation. As the Enlightenment shows, scholastic appraisal does not exclusively decide the fate of knowledge. It depends much more on intellectuals' intentions, motives, or allegiances. This depends also on how the conceptual field of Modernity defines this function, on what being an intellectual means, what differentiates it from the clever academic expert.

Definition is crucial. It avoids predictably digressing into the Enlightenment's reception, into already historicized thinking, inevitably treating it as an antique, an *objet d'art*, a cultural heirloom, as much a burden as a treasure. It identifies intellectual work. It evaluates its function. It attempts to say what it actually does.

In Modernity's conceptual field the Enlightenment forms a range of intellectual-functions. Here, both in the human and natural sciences, knowledge

is organized and developed by the orthodoxy of technically specialized disciplines. Further, the unprecedented social and economic instrumentalization of knowledge, the expansion of the ‘general intellect’, the infiltration of technology into all aspects of personal and public life have broadened immensely the entire category of intellectual work. This trend is well-known. ‘Intellectual’ becomes a pale abstraction. Further still, in Modernity’s conceptual field the heterogeneity of facts and values produced by the synchronous convergence of their asynchronous character favours confusion rather than clarity. The resulting diversity of intellectual values declines into the occlusive clamour of specialized opinion. Even so, the opposite, the rigid, disciplinary arrangement of homogeneous patterns of thought would trigger apprehension. What else would it indicate but the ideological promotion of dominant values, the values of dominant cultural interests?

Many authoritative sociologists and philosophers see most, if not all, forms of academic work as intellectual. But it is necessary to insist on this distinction, even to enlarge it to contrast the intellectual (on the one hand) with the academic, with the professional technician, the scholastic expert, the specialist (on the other). This discrimination is crucial. The conventional, sociological conception of what activity defines the intellectual tends to erase it.

In *The Intellectuals and the Powers & Other Essays* (1972) Edward Shils identifies independent authors, university academics in all disciplines, as well as their students, as intellectuals. He does, however, recognize that the term can be expanded to apply to those in administrative positions as much as it loses coherence due to increasing academic specialization (Shils 1972: 74ff., 91ff., 112ff., 122, 126). Richard Rorty coins the term ‘humanistic intellectual’ to explain to the university and its public what constitutes the humanities thereby defending them from deconstructive Postmodernist thinking (Rorty 1999: 127–30). Gramsci, for example, denying non-intellectuals exist, sees everyone as an intellectual since in both their work and leisure intellectual activity – even if to a small degree – still occurs. He aims, therefore, to create a ‘new stratum of intellectuals’ formed not by the humanities but by technical education and industrial labour. His particular materialistic stance dissociates the new intellectual from the love of language (dismissed as ‘eloquence [...] a momentary mover of feeling and passions’) to ‘active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, “permanent persuader”’, – as if language in itself were not a ‘primordial reality’ and writing commitment to it (Gramsci 2007: 9–10). But to construct such a comprehensive category fails to recognize crucial differences in its cognitive stance. By contrast, the intellectual in the particular sense defined here uses his or her knowledge as a motive for vigilant apprehension, for reservation and dissent. In this respect the intellectual is a ‘fault-finder’ [Nörgler] or spoilsport [*Spielverderber*] to use Walter Benjamin’s characterization of Siegfried Kracauer, someone out to ‘sow disorder’ [*semer le trouble*], as Régis Debray puts it (Benjamin 1971: 116, 122; Debray 2006: 102). It affirms Theodor Adorno’s precept, – the precept of the ‘quintessential intellectual’:

‘having the strength for reflection, for determination, for refusing to join in’ [*zum Nicht Mitmachen*] (Adorno 2003: 679; cf. Said 1994: 41).

The affirmative intellectual category encompasses: (i) *The academic proper*: the expert; the scientist; the scholarly connoisseur; the ‘new mandarins’ (Chomsky 1969b: 25ff.); the pedantic ‘philosophical worker’, the self-abnegating ‘objective man’ [*der objektive Mensch*] (Nietzsche 1988b: 144, §211; 135–6, §207); the ‘mindless academic specialist’ (Lukács 1976: 105–6, 198); the ‘superfluous work’ of the academic philosopher that ‘simply adds to the stock of an academic discipline’s specialized output’ (Spengler 1977: VII–VIII); the ‘sullen specialist with his sterile knowledge’ (Bergson 2011: 41); the ‘treacherous cleric’ (Benda 1977: 64ff.);

(ii) *The bureaucratic administrator* (close to what Gouldner calls the ‘intelligentsia’ (Gouldner 1979: 49ff.)): the manager with his or her ‘administrative gaze’ (Adorno 1979: 122); the ‘humanist bureaucrat’ (Valéry 1960: 923); the ‘exact man’ [*der exakte Mensch*] prevalent in all walks of life such as the researcher, the salesman, the organizer, the sportsman, technician (Musil 1978: I, 247); the ‘trained and specialized bureaucratic official’ (Weber 1980: 835); the ‘resources manager’, the custodian, the curator [*Besteller des Bestandes*] (Heidegger 1967: 25–7); the ‘organizing man’ [*l’homme de rangement*] (Baudrillard 1968: 27);

(iii) *The problem-solver*: the ‘cognitariat’ (Jencks 1989: 44); ‘not [...] intellectually much higher than an artisan’ (Peirce 1992: 212); the ‘engineer as the knowledgable priest of the machine’ [*der Ingenieur, der wissende Priester der Maschine*] (Spengler 1976: 1191); the technician (Ortega y Gasset 1993: 108; Sartre 1972: 25ff.); the ‘highly gifted technician of method’ [*ein höchst genialer Techniker der Methode*] (Husserl 2012b: 61); the ‘information engineer’ (Toulmin 1992: 104).

This categorization illustrates the diversity of general intellectual work and critical responses to it. Even so most of these intellectual-functions could become intellectuals in the sense explored here. What differentiates the intellectual in this specific sense is his or her attitude towards knowledge: that it facilitates apprehension and vigilance, that it motivates reservation and dissidence. This categorization also testifies to the asynchronous heterogeneity of attitudes and values in Modernity. However much clarity each function may disseminate, their overall effect is dazzling. The very freedom of enquiry each disciplinary orthodoxy claims for itself proves confusing in its overall resulting heterogeneity. As Enlightenment thinkers recognized, the only response to this cognitive situation is eclecticism, the rejection of any dominant intellectual authority, as in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* article on the subject, or as in Montesquieu’s observation (akin to that by Whitehead) that ‘philosophy has connections with everything’ (Diderot 1994a: 300; Montesquieu 1949: 1134; §612). In a modern culture of specialization specialists and experts reject eclecticism as unsystematic, as dilettantism. But it is more demanding than technical specialization. It results from nothing if not the love of language and the desire for knowledge that sustains the intellectual.

Both language and knowledge make up the human world. Both attitudes, the love of language and the desire for knowledge, for their own sake and as a fundamental human interest, figure prominently in the intellectual-function that characterizes the Enlightenment. In his *La Morale universelle* [*Universal Morality*] (1776) D'Holbach briefly reviews the spectrum of *gens de lettres* (men and women of letters) and ideally defines the nature and purpose of their respective social intellectual-functions: (i) the *philosophe* who is to discover in humanity the truth essential for its happiness; (ii) *orators* whose eloquence, sustained by philosophy, will divert human beings from their errors and encourage compassion for other human beings like themselves; (iii) *historians* who with their research and eloquence should paint a tableau of human vicissitudes; (iv) *poets* who, forsaking frivolous themes, should use their wisdom, their eloquence, and the lessons of history to decorate truth with the charms with which imagination is capable of embellishing them; (v) *érudits et savants* (scholars and the learned) who should cease rummaging in a shady antiquity finding there nothing useful for present peoples; (vi) *penseurs* (thinkers) who should no longer penetrate into the terrible labyrinth of tortuous metaphysics, which offers no benefit to the human species, but instead turn their mental subtlety towards objects conforming to human nature that it can grasp; (vii) *physiciens, naturalists, médecins* (physicists, natural scientists, doctors) who should forsake vain hypotheses and instead follow experience, the source of facts that will produce a reliable system truly useful to the human race; (viii) *jurisconsultes* (lawyers) who should break with routine and affirming authority and in the very nature of humanity look for laws that conform to it, hence for a just, simple, and uncomplicated morality people so desperately need (D'Holbach 2004b: 635).

This list of intellectual-functions, like the list of the various envisaged contributors to the *Encyclopédie* specified in its 'Preliminary Discourse', is anchored in two key principles (cf. D'Alembert 2011a: 158–67): that the acquisition of knowledge – through the love of words and the desire for knowledge – is an existential benefit to mankind; that it is the responsibility of each of these intellectual-functions in their own way to maintain and defend this existential value. By implication it recapitulates Descartes' insight in *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit* [*Rules for directing the mind*] (1627–1628) that the specialization of knowledge neglects and loses sight of the 'common-sense' or 'universal knowledge' [*l'universelle Sagesse*] that alone gives any specific knowledge meaning and value (Descartes 1996: 3). The list of heterogeneous and asynchronic intellectual-functions in the broader conceptual field of Modernity shows that these principles have been discarded and Descartes' warning unheeded. With the Enlightenment underwriting this existential value, the contrast between them gauges the decline of Modernity. Clearly, as Paul Valéry remarked, the Enlightenment could not have anticipated its future reception by modern 'primitive readers' inevitably insensitive to its cultural claims.

(b.) Contemplating the proliferation of atomized knowledge and heterogeneous values, a critical, cultivated observer in Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* [*The Man without Qualities*] (1930ff.) maintains that 'no-one thinks of being responsible for it all [...] there is no longer any authority in our chaos' (Musil 1978: II, 564). Still, responsibility for the fate of knowledge stays with the intellectual. However the intellectual-function is defined, it still remains an indispensable cultural attitude. Essentially it is the conviction – the self-imposed, intellectual obligation recognized by Kafka in 'At Night' ['Nachts'] (1920) – that 'someone has to keep watch, they say [...]. Someone must be there' [*Warum wachst du? Einer muß wachen, heißt es. Einer muß da sein*], a conviction also endorsed by Karl Mannheim in conceiving of the intellectual as a 'watchman on a night that is all too dark' [*Wächter zu sein in einer allzu finsternen Nacht*], an enduring conviction – not unfamiliar to Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations* amidst other treacherous circumstances – that the soul of the wise man 'is ever on the watch to prevent the occurrence of anything unforeseen, anything unexpected, anything whatever that is strange' (Kafka 1983: 309; Mannheim 1995: 140; Cicero 1996: 369).¹ With this conviction the intellectual-function affirms what Mannheim calls 'the principal purpose of thought: to know and to foresee in order to act' (Mannheim 2014b: 160).

(c.) Both Montesquieu and Dumarsais personify largely complementary definitions of the *philosophe*: of his behaviour in practice and in theory, in its real and ideal forms. Both exhibit *apprehension*: in Montesquieu's case, because what he knows alerts him to what threatens his existence as an intellectual; in Dumarsais's case, because his empiricist thinking invites opposition from both the Catholic Church and a superstitious and opinionated public. Both also demonstrate *commitment* to a comprehensive social-anthropological outlook: Montesquieu revealing the cultural determination of the mind, Dumarsais recognizing the diversity of cultural values. Both demonstrate not least a sense of *responsibility* for the fate of knowledge: with Montesquieu advocating a rational reconception of the formation and value of law, with Dumarsais constructing the idea of a living moral ideal through intellectual self-management.

Thus Montesquieu and Dumarsais represent a basic type of intellectual behaviour. It is presented as an innate propensity in human beings. For both it is an always present *eutopia*, a better place, and, as long as it is imagined and written about, a perpetual enhancement to the *Lebenswelt*, to the world as it is experienced. Even its naïve historicism that projects it onto the future is a temporal component amongst others of present behaviour, of its commitment to its actual realization. This behaviour and the cognitive situation determining it affect the Enlightenment's value.

In defining the *philosophe* in the *Encyclopédie* Dumarsais offers one version of the modern intellectual, – a theoretical version, its ideal-type, but not least a personal self-ideal for anyone seduced by the love of knowledge. In effect he outlines a cultural and social space for this ideal cognitive behaviour expressed in the

uncompromising assertion that ‘the *philosophe* is an honest man who in all things acts by reason and who combine mental self-reflection and acuity with good manners and sociable qualities’ (Dumarsais 2019: 12:510). On these terms he differentiates the *philosophe* from philosophical imposters: those who live withdrawn in obscurity and with a smattering of wisdom; those freethinkers who break free of the limitations of religion and have only scorn for those pusillanimous minds, fearful of irreligion, confining themselves to already established truths, and succumbing eventually to superstition; and those ‘ordinary philosophers’ who spend too much time thinking, fail to think properly, and so fall into misanthropy. By contrast, like Hume’s philosopher in his essay ‘On Essay Writing’, the *philosophe*, ‘full of humanity’, shares his time between study, his love of knowledge, and social business, *le commerce des hommes*. To vindicate this attitude Dumarsais cites often quoted lines by Chremes from Terence’s comedy, *Heauton Timourumenos* [*The Self-Tormenter*]: ‘*homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto*’: ‘I am human, so any human interest is my concern’. He thus affirms the *philosophe*’s disposition as conducive to culturally tolerant behaviour from an anthropological perspective (cf. Terence 1976: 104; Dumarsais 2019: 12:510).

Proposed here is an exacting form of behaviour both cognitive and social. The *philosophe* whose experience is based on an ‘infinity of particular observations’ is self-reflecting, self-managing. He seeks clarity about his motivation. He is aware of what causes govern his movements and so knows which to resist or to follow. Taking a materialist and empiricist stance Dumarsais likens the *philosophe* to ‘a clock that winds itself up’ (Dumarsais 2019: 12:509). Through this self-reflection the *philosophe* is able to maintain his sense of well-being, his capacity for being reasonable. Precisely here equivalence produces a transvaluation of values with the assertion that ‘reason is for the *philosophe* what grace is for the Christian’ (Dumarsais 2019: 12:509).

The *philosophe* avoids obstacles to his well-being, to being reasonable. Rather than letting himself be transported by his passions he reflects on them before acting. So though he may proceed in the dark, like those carried away by their passions, he is ‘preceded by torchlight’ (Dumarsais 2019: 12:509). With his moral principle based empirically on that ‘infinity of particular observations’, the *philosophe* traces its origin, ‘determines its intrinsic value, and uses it when convenient’, – unlike the people who simply accept any given moral maxim (Dumarsais 2019: 12:509). Dumarsais’s description shows that the crucial capacity of the *philosophe* is his judgement. It regulates his existence. It requires a *justesse d’esprit*, a mental perspicuity, to know when to assert an idea or course of action and when to dissent from it. Consequently the *philosophe* does not adhere to any metaphysical or moral system. To avoid mental or moral complacency, his attitude is closer to eclecticism (Dumarsais 2019: 12:510).

In dismissing values antagonistic to the *philosophe* Dumarsais discloses a space, formerly occupied by religion, his cognitive stance can occupy. Just as reason displaces grace, so society displaces God: ‘[C]ivil society is [...] the sole divinity that he recognizes on earth’; ‘honour and probity are uniquely his religion’. In worshipping it with his probity, his duties, and his ‘sincere desire’ not

to obstruct it, the *philosophe*'s intention is to assert the practical value of his cognitive behaviour (Dumarsais 2019: 12:510). His basic value is to be sociable: reason demands that he learns, studies, and works to acquire sociable values. His social 'persona' – echoing Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* – is that of 'an honest man who wishes to please and to make himself useful' (cf. Cicero 1996: 468–71, 494–5; Dumarsais 2019: 12:510). Specifically, that a spirit of order or reason informs his behaviour, that his volition thus affirms these cardinal moral values, makes the *philosophe* honest.

In a critique of self-serving interests in the general public Dumarsais insists that, with his honesty and probity, his sense of order and regulation, his ideas on the social good, he has superior knowledge of the principles of civil society [*il en connaît les principes bien mieux que les autres hommes*] (Dumarsais 2019: 12:510). He thus demonstrates every day that 'the more rational and enlightened the individual is, the more securely and properly he conducts the commerce of life' [*plus on a de raison et de lumière, plus on est sûr et propre pour le commerce de la vie*]. He goes further still to connect theoretical Enlightenment values with practical politics: he asserts – after the manner of Plato – that grafting a sovereign onto a *philosophe* with all his enlightened values would produce 'a perfect sovereign' (Dumarsais 2019: 12:510). And so Dumarsais concludes – modestly enough – by the *philosophe* not being tyrannized by his passions, but using and regulating them for the sake of sociability; by him forsaking the wiles of fortune and the torments of ambition; by him being satisfied with an 'honest superfluity' of wealth that affords the 'commodities of life' (Dumarsais 2019: 12:511).

Dumarsais's definition of the *philosophe* establishes characteristics that have persistently compromised the intellectual-function. On the one hand, modern society does require the intellectual's distanced vigilance embedded in it for its self-reflection and self-evaluation; on the other, the intellectual can be seduced by his own idealism, his ideal self, thereby arrogantly indulging himself in his own (allegedly) superior knowledge. Dumarsais's definition might yet leave the intellectual 'free-floating'.

(d.) Dumarsais describes the ideal self-image of the *philosophe*, a prototype of the modern intellectual in theory. Montesquieu, by contrast, demonstrates the modern intellectual-function in practice, pragmatically. He knows the attitude of apprehensive vigilance. To augment it in himself, he confronts it with his own thinking and writing, with his desire for knowledge, and with his concern, both as a political philosopher and as a magistrate, for law and justice. But he does have his own ideal self-image: Cicero – 'of all the Classical authors, [...] the one who had the most personal merit and whom [he] would most like to resemble' [*Cicéron est, de tous les anciens, celui qui a eu le plus de mérite personnel, et à qui j'aimerois mieux ressembler*]. And he continues, 'no-one else had supported the finest and greatest characters, had so much loved glory, achieved it so solidly, and by following the least frequented paths'. 'Reading his works', he adds, 'lifts no less the heart than the mind: his eloquence is quite grand, quite majestic, quite heroic' (Montesquieu 1949: 93). In particular

Montesquieu says he admires this philosopher and orator for being the first Roman to have wrested philosophy from the hands of specialists and made it, like reason, something everyone would have in common. He wishes only Cicero had come to a more enlightened century where his talents, which previously had only destroyed errors, could have been put to discovering truths. Cicero left behind (says the biting satirist of contemporary manners and the political philosopher who recast the very conception of government) a ‘terrible void in philosophy’ since ‘he had destroyed everything that had been imagined up until then’ (Montesquieu 1949: 94).

Montesquieu defines his cognitive situation in practical terms that avoid intellectual arrogance. It combines – as a dimension of personal and social reality – the mind [*esprit*], the love of knowledge and study, and language through the pleasures of writing and reading. It affirms the intellectual world as an inalienable human reality. This cognitive stance is exemplified in *Essai sur le goût dans les choses de la nature et de l’art* [‘Essay on Taste in Matters of Nature and Art’], published posthumously (1757) in the *Encyclopédie*. For Montesquieu it is axiomatic that ‘our soul is made for thinking, in other words for perceiving’. This means that ‘such a being must have curiosity, since all things are in a chain in which each idea precedes one and follows another of them’. Consequently, ‘one cannot like to see one thing without desiring to see another one of them’ (Montesquieu 1951: 1243). He knows about his world (as exemplified by *Lettres persanes*), about how law, government, economics, and natural science operate (as represented *inter alia* by *De l’esprit des lois* and by his juridical office). Above all, he evinces a comprehensive capacity for self-reflection and self-evaluation in relation to this world (as in *Mes pensées* and *Spicilège*). His life and works testify to an underlying concern for the values orientating social behaviour.

(e.) For Montesquieu both the mind and the love of knowledge focus on a concern for language expressed through writing and reading as the intellectual’s pre-occupation. Significantly he critically reviews his commitment to this self-defining task. In *Mes Pensées* Montesquieu records that he would wonder ‘what the use is of writing books for this tiny Earth which is no bigger than a dot [*Je disois: “A quoi bon faire des livres pour cette petite Terre, qui n’est pas plus grande qu’un point”*’] (Montesquieu 1949: 1418). The intimidating fall-out from the modern, scientific, unsettling reconception of the world, this cosmological view seems to render writing, the formation of something humanly meaningful, redundant. It might annihilate it. Nevertheless, Montesquieu did write books, – such as the satirical, engaging masterpiece *Lettres persanes* (1721/1754), that Valéry described as a ‘delicious anthology’ [*recueil délicieux*], as a ‘perfect book’ [*livre parfait*] (Valéry 1957: 508, 516); the witty exploitation of the theory of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls, in the uncompleted *Histoire véritable*; the voluminous, influential *De l’Ésprit des lois* (1748/1757), the outcome of a life dedicated to studying philosophy, art, history, politics, economics, current affairs, and ethics on a global scale. The author of *Lettres persanes* might well have appreciated the absurdity of his situation, the ontological

eccentricity of personal consciousness in an endless, indifferent, universe. (Or rather, if consciousness is ultimately a capacity inherent in the evolution of matter, its significance is merely gratuitous. To invert Pascal's observation: the human creature might well be a 'thinking reed' [*roseau pensant*], but still merely a reed (cf. Pascal 1963a: 528; §200–347).) But Montesquieu did recognize that cosmology's value-system was inappropriate for evaluating human behaviour as expressed in the customs, manners, and institutions it has created and which motivate it. In other words, a new value-system and a new methodology based on it would be required to vindicate writing, not least writing about customs, manners, and institutions.

This then crucially defines the intellectual: writing, – writing is what he or she does. Moreover, what he or she writes justifies itself, as Montesquieu explains. When he is asked if a word is French or not, he can (he says) respond to it. But when asked if an expression [*diction*] is correct, he cannot reply unless it is ungrammatical. He has no knowledge of where it would be correct nor what use an intellectual [*homme d'esprit*] could make of it.² The reason is: '[A]n *homme d'esprit* is, in his works, a creator of expressions, of phrasings and conceptions' [*car un homme d'esprit est dans ses ouvrages, créateur de dictions, de tours et de conceptions*]. He 'clothes his thinking according to his own fashion'. He 'forms it and creates it by ways of speaking far removed from the vulgar, but which do not appear to have been placed so as to be removed from it' [*il habille sa pensée à sa mode, la forme, la crée par des façons de parler éloignées du vulgaire, mais qui ne paroissent pas être mises pour s'en éloigner*]. He asserts, therefore, that 'a man who writes well does not write as anyone writes, but as he himself writes, and it is often in speaking poorly that he speaks well' [*Un homme qui écrit bien n'écrit pas comme on a écrit, mais comme il écrit, et c'est souvent en parlant mal qu'il parle bien*] (Montesquieu 1949: 1216; §780). It is as if Montesquieu anticipates Alvin W. Gouldner's distinction between (on the one hand) 'good speech' as 'speech that can make its own principles *explicit* and is oriented to conforming with them, rather than stressing context-sensitivity and context-variability'; and (on the other) the culture of critical discourse that 'authorizes itself [...] as the standard of *all* "serious" speech', so that 'speech becomes impersonal, [...] disembodied, de-contextualized and self-grounded', the jargon of a 'new class' comprising both the technocratic intelligentsia and humanist intellectuals emerging from bourgeois culture and its opposition to the *ancien régime* (Gouldner 1979: 15–16, 29, 64–5). Accordingly, at the very beginning of *De l'Esprit des Lois* Montesquieu insists on defining what he means by 'political virtue', a crucial concept in his political philosophy differentiating a love of one's country and equality from moral or Christian virtue. Though it is liable to be misunderstood, he justifies this differentiation by insisting that 'his new ideas required him to find new words or to give new meanings to old ones' [*J'ai eu des idées nouvelles; il a bien fallu trouver de nouveaux mots, ou donner aux anciens de nouvelles acceptions*] (Montesquieu 1951: 227). His basic point as someone concerned with words is that self-expression needs to break style-conventions to be effective, to break established discursive norms to formulate

new ideas, hence, his assertion – that his whole *oeuvre* demonstrates – that it is advisable to write on all subjects and with all styles, particularly since philosophy, having connections with everything, must not be isolated [*Il est donc bon que l'on écrive sur tous les sujets et de tous les styles. La philosophie ne doit point être isolée: elle a des rapports avec tout*] (Montesquieu 1949: 1134; §612).

Then reflecting further on this writing as a social and political function Montesquieu observes: ‘When I act, I am a citizen; but when I write, I am a human being, and I regard all the peoples of Europe with the same impartiality as the different peoples of the island of Madagascar’ [*Quand j’agis, je suis citoyen; mais, lorsque j’écris, je suis homme, et je regarde tous les peuples de l’Europe avec la même impartialité que les différents peuples de l’île de Madagascar*] (Montesquieu 1949: 997; §86). His conviction here can be aligned with Dumarsais’s endorsement of Chremes’ humanistic maxim in Terence’s *The Self-Tormentor*. It involves various axiological criteria: a value-system based on anthropology as a way of studying heterogeneous, globally distributed value-cultures; a principle of natural law, the distinction between ‘Man’, the citizen governed by and responding to the laws of the state, and ‘Man’, a human being with fundamental, vital needs the state must support. But there is something more. This principle of natural law permits Montesquieu to assert writing as having in itself an essentially universal human claim. That he asserts the priority of the act of writing over social and political action may seem strange, particularly in a restless, self-revolutionizing modern culture. But by ‘writing’ Montesquieu means literary and philosophical works, reflective works like his own, that connect with all human beings, writings with undiminished significance, with inexhaustible reserves of apprehensive vigilance seeking knowledge for the sake of indispensable existential reassurance.

That writing has this significance is confirmed by its necessary, existential complement, the act of reading, as the comment on Cicero suggests. In *Mes Pensées* Montesquieu notes that ‘liking to read is to exchange the hours of tedium that one has to have in one’s life for hours of delight’ [*Aimer à lire, c’est faire un échange des heures d’ennui que l’on doit avoir en sa vie, contre des heures délicieuses*] (Montesquieu 1949: 1293; §1143). In an address identifying the motives that should encourage interest in the sciences [*Discours sur les motifs qui doivent nous encourager aux sciences* (1725)] Montesquieu stresses ‘personal happiness’, since, he continues: ‘[T]he love of studying is in us almost the only everlasting passion; all the others gradually leave us as this wretched machine [i.e. one’s body] that supplies them to us comes closer to being ruined’ [*L’amour de l’étude est presque en nous la seule passion éternelle; toutes les autres nous quittent, à mesure que cette misérable machine qui nous les donne s’approche de sa ruine*]. Moreover, this happiness is something existential, as when in *Mes Pensées* he affirms: ‘For me studying has been the sovereign remedy against world-weariness, never having had any sorrow that would not have been dispelled by reading for an hour’ [*L’étude a été pour moi le souverain remède contre les dégoûts de la vie, n’ayant jamais eu de chagrin qu’une heure de lecture ne m’ait ôté*] (Montesquieu 1949: 55, 975; §4).

The intellectual affirms the value of writing, – consequently, of reading, and of his or her writing being read. In a footnote in his ‘Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les esprits et les caractères’ [Essay on the Causes that can affect Minds and Characters] Montesquieu stresses the difference between a language where there have been no writers and another where there have been fine geniuses who have written in it [*Voyez la différence d’une langue où il n’y a point eu d’écrivains, et d’une autre où il y a eu de beaux génies qui ont écrit*] (Montesquieu 1951: 54). Appreciating in this way the value of language, the intellectual asserts knowledge as a universal value and justifies his responsibility for it.³ The textual point that footnote refers to stresses the significance of education as a means of both ‘procuring ideas’ and ‘organizing them in relation to the *proper value* of things’ [*à les proportionner à la juste valeur des choses*] (my emphasis): the varying relationships between ideas and their evaluation largely accounting for the prevailing diversity of mental attitudes [*esprits*] (Montesquieu 1951: 54).

(f.) Montesquieu might have indulged himself in historicism – like, for example, D’Alembert in the ‘Preliminary Discourse’ [Discours préliminaire] (1751) of the *Encyclopédie*, Ferguson in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), Kant in ‘Idea for a general history with a cosmopolitan intention’ [‘Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht’] (1784), or Condorcet in *Outline of a Historical Tableau of the Progress of the Human Mind* [*Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain*] (1793), let alone Fichte in *The Basic Features of the Present Age* [*Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*] (1806) or Hegel in *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* [*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*] (1840/1848). He might have projected his conception of an enlightened world onto some distant future and commandeered the ‘historical process’ to realize it, had the unforeseen and the unforeseeable not deterred him. Instead, Montesquieu recognized that an enlightened world could be envisaged by legislation, hence his attempt to define what law is, what the spirit motivating it could be, what connected types of political power structures (e.g. despotism, monarchy, or republic) radically with economic, social, and cultural systems and values. This radical connection he identifies as justice, possibly a purely human invention for the sake of human sociability, a transcendental surrogate for God beyond any human conventions (cf. Montesquieu 1949: xxx; 256). In an address to the Bordeaux *parlement* in 1725 he states that justice must be universal, that it must apply in both professional and private life as a general form of self-conduct [*une conduit générale*]. ‘Let us be just’, he says, ‘just everywhere, just in all respects, towards everyone, on every occasion’ [*Soyons justes dans tous les lieux, justes à tous égards, envers toutes personnes, en toutes occasions*] (Montesquieu 1949: 48). By this definition justice signifies not virtues defining particular relationships between individual people but rather a ‘general connection’ [*rapport général*], concerning human beings in themselves and in relation to other human beings (as with Dumarsais’ assertion of good judgement). Justice is, therefore, the premise of a hierarchy of values that puts duty towards the human species before patriotism, the duty towards

human beings before the criminally forgetful duty of the citizen. As a sense of what is just, justice is integral to the human species, a common socio-legal value created by it, that underlies other, particularly estranging civic or ethnic affiliations (Montesquieu 1949: 110).

Crucially, therefore, the concept of justice means that an enlightened world need neither be historically postponed nor inhibited by the unforeseen and the unforeseeable. Informing the ‘principle of the supremacy of law’ it could be enacted immediately in an apposite system of government. Given that social power is transformed into the ‘specifically legal’ (as Philip Allott argues on a materialistic, physiological basis not incompatible with Montesquieu’s anthropological method), then ‘to serve its function in the structure-system of society, law has a specific character, like blood or muscle or cellulose in a living organism’. What law specifically does: it stores ‘potential energy [...] as acts of will’. What this means is: ‘Society wills in advance of the event in the form of legal relations’. Consequently, ‘the willing in advance is retained in the form of law’. Law would thus not be a surrogate for historicism, for a dynamic that imprisons and instrumentalizes the individual historical agent. Rather it mitigates the apprehension of the unforeseen. At least it reckons with the unforeseeable that historicism at its own risk blithely ignores. For if society as a structure-system is to survive, ‘it must be able to control its future from the point of view of its past, to control its future by willing and acting in the past of that future’. What, most importantly, this requires: ‘[I]t must be able to cause its future to be realized in its continuous present-here-and-now by placing into that present-here-and-now acts of will from its past designed to carry its substance, its structure-system, into its future’. Hence the analysis of the supremacy of law as ‘principle’ coincides with the analysis of laws from the standpoint of their essential ‘spirit’. Montesquieu would surely have endorsed Allott’s conclusion, that it is an ‘ultimate human need and right to be a member of societies under the law’, since that is the only way for human beings ‘endowed with the capacity to will and act in consciousness, constantly [to] create themselves in accordance with their purposes’. This conception of law is as inclusive, as comprehensive, as Montesquieu’s conception of justice: ‘[S]uch a right, and such a need, is the human right and human need in every form of society, from the society of a particular family to the international society of the whole human race [...]’ (Allott 2001: 174–5).

Montesquieu was, therefore, not invoking a simplistic ‘law of history’ to determine the future and discount its unforeseeable risks. Instead, as his analysis of different types of government demonstrates, legislation in the present already projects the future by regulating history. It thereby allows for the unforeseeable, as Montesquieu’s reflections on it confirm. Further, the anthropological character of his conception of law counteracts the spurious universalism motivating historicism, be it in its naïve or sophisticated forms. Hence, his commitment to law for its systematic regulation of human affairs, anthropological diversity, and conceptual order, for it being a fiction, for being, therefore, absolutely indispensable.

Further, with the spirit of the laws – whatever the form of government – all-pervasive, with the human right and need to live under the law, automatically the ethos of social action complements and is complemented by rational reflection on it, – not least because rational reflection, as in the form of writing, is a social action. The principle of justice, like the act of writing, operates on the premise of natural, not civil law. ‘Justice’, Montesquieu affirms (as mentioned above), ‘is a general connection’ [*un rapport général*]. By that he means: ‘[I]t concerns the individual him- or herself’, – that is: not the individual defined by political or socio-economic position. Instead, ‘it concerns him- or herself in relation to every human being’ [*elle concerne l’homme en lui-même; elle le concerne par rapport à tous les hommes*] (Montesquieu 1949: 110). Similarly, justice enhances and is enhanced by philosophy which is connected with everything (Montesquieu 1949: 1134; §612). Clearly justice is the value that motivates the intellectual-function. It governs its commitment to action produced by the principal purpose of thought. It guides its search for knowledge and its self-distancing reflection on it, both tasks fostered by apprehensive vigilance, both issuing in commitment to action. But informing justice – already enhanced by philosophical reflection – is human reason. This constitutes ‘law in general’ [*la loi, en général*] since ‘it governs all the peoples of the Earth’: ‘[T]he political and civil law of each nation cannot be other than particular cases where human reason is applicable’ (Montesquieu 1951: 237). What further coordinates justice, philosophy, and reason, what underlies the world, the human constituency, they establish, are mind [*esprit*] and common sense [*le bon sens*], this latter (according to Descartes whose work Montesquieu admired) the aptitude most widely shared in society (Descartes 1966: 33; §1). Common sense he defines as ‘the just comparison of things’ and distinguishing these same things in both their positive and relative state. But, the most significant aspect of this thought-pattern is mind [*esprit*]. Montesquieu differentiates it from ‘wit’ (which *esprit* also translates) as a necessary ingredient of conversation. For him it signifies instead a particularly French kind of *esprit* (and a mental faculty not yet overwhelmed by Modernity, by its culture of the scientific fact). Rather, *esprit* – *esprit* in itself – consists in ‘common sense combined with light’ [*L’esprit, en lui-même, c’est le bon sens joint à la lumière*] (Montesquieu 1949: 1417; §1740).⁴

2. The Enlightenment: Gauging the decline of Modernity (I)

(a.) The intellectual’s cognitive situation occurs paradigmatically in the Enlightenment (as illustrated by Dumarsais and Montesquieu). The love of words underpins the desire for knowledge, which permits reflection both on the intellectual’s existence (*savoir être*) and on his or her cognitive attitude. The Enlightenment may not have realized its ideals but, therefore, might be uniquely placed to diagnose in Modernity ‘the mental suffering of our time’ (Huizinga 2014). The Enlightenment offers in itself a useful standard for

gauging Modernity's decline, thereby revealing the perpetual self-subversion of its values.

(b.) In *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* [*The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*] (1932) – published as fascism was close to grasping political power and its author confronting the homelessness of the migrant – Cassirer confirms the Enlightenment's core values.⁵ To this end he quotes from Montesquieu's *Essai sur le goût dans les choses de la nature et de l'art* [1757] [Essay on Taste in Matters of Nature and of Art] and its advocacy of the desire for knowledge. As Cassirer puts it: this potentially unorthodox, de-stabilizing desire for knowledge [*libido sciendi*] banned by dogmatic theology and stigmatized by it as intellectual arrogance, Montesquieu 'appreciates as a necessary characteristic of the soul as such, thereby restoring it to its constitutional and primordial right' [*als eine notwendige Beschaffenheit der Seele als solcher erklärt und damit in ihrem Grund- und Urrecht wiederhergestellt*]. According to Cassirer, 'defending, empowering and reinforcing this manner of thinking is the essential goal eighteenth-century culture sets itself'. It sees its most important task not as the acquisition and dissemination of positive knowledge, but rather as the assertion of this radical cognitive stance (Cassirer 1973: 17). Moreover, this stance needs to be affirmed if the knowledge it produces is to sustain an intellectual culture of apprehensive vigilance.

The principle informing it is reason [*Vernunft*], construed not as an acquired treasure-trove of the already known, but as 'the mentally constitutional and primordial force [*die geistige Grund- und Urkraft*] that leads to the discovery of truth, to its determination and its security'. The eighteenth century (says Cassirer) saw it as 'a form of energy, as a force that could be fully understood only through its practice and its effect', – in terms of not what it is [*Sein*] but how it works [*Tun*] (Cassirer 1973: 16). This definition needs to be retained. Crucially it resists the conventional response (illustrated by Isaiah Berlin), dismissive of the Enlightenment, that sees 'reason', be it empirical or formal, as a calculating disposition, cold and scientific (especially if contrasted historically with the Counter-Enlightenment and Romanticism and their emotive form of comprehension). As though – due to a crude historicism not even any dialectic could redeem – a single culture at any given moment would *not* contain multifarious asynchronous and conflicting value-systems. As though social and cultural attitudes were always precisely synchronized with the pace of historical events.

(c.) Rather reason figures here as a symbolic form, as defined by Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* [*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*] (1923–1929), his phenomenological reconception of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*], understood in its broadest sense (Cassirer 1977b: 208). It is predicated on the mind [*Geist*] and the world as represented symbolically, i.e. in terms of words, images, and numbers, as versions of the reality in which people live. The philosophy of symbolic forms, however, inverts this dualistic relationship between the mind and the world external to it. Instead of analysing the use of symbols as a means of representing the world in language, art, myth, and science, he re-evaluates

these forms of knowledge as inherently symbolic. He is interested not in what symbols in language, myth, and art achieve, but ‘rather in how far language as a *whole*, myth as a *whole*, art as a *whole* bear within themselves the general character of symbolic formation’ (Cassirer 1977a: 174). The significance of this inversion is radical. Knowledge, based on its symbolic character, comprises not just conceptualization or explanation, but also ‘any intellectual activity in which we construct a “world” for ourselves in its characteristic formation, in its orderly arrangement, and in the way it happens to be’ [*sondern jede geistige Tätigkeit, in der wir uns eine “Welt” in ihrer charakteristischen Gestaltung, in ihrer Ordnung und in ihrem “So-Sein”, aufbauen*] (Cassirer 1977b: 208).

Symbolic forms resemble Kant’s categories as *a priori* concepts of understanding in so far as there is no getting around them or outside of them. As Cassirer asserts, ‘only *in* these forms can we observe, experience, imagine, think; we are bound to their purely *immanent* meaning and performance’ (Cassirer 1977b: 209). His argument thus steers a course between two crucial philosophical tendencies. On the one hand, he rejects the move away from symbolic representation towards ‘the basic metaphysical certainty of pure intuition’ [*zur metaphysischen Grundgewissheit der reinen Intuition*] as evinced in Heidegger’s re-evaluation of language as the numinous ‘house of Being’ and his concomitant devaluation of reason through its deconstruction as technical, calculating ratiocination (Cassirer 1977a: 199; cf. Heidegger 1997: 198–9, 210). On the other, Cassirer cannot identify with one of the most influential philosophers of Modernity, let alone the Enlightenment, with George Berkeley as in *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1713). He regards Berkeley’s conception of language as ‘anticipating its modern, positivistic critique’ (produced, for example, by the Vienna Circle, or by Richard von Mises’s ‘empiricist conception of science’ [*empiristische Wissenschaftsauffassung*]) which on purely linguistic and logical grounds questions the basis of metaphysical claims (Cassirer 1977a: 199). Specifically truth, cognitive veracity, are produced by sentences [*Protokollsätze*] in which language is reduced to precise, unambiguous formulations automatically excluding anything imaginative, religious, or emotional, anything about the wider scope of human experience. Similarly Berkeley rejects a cognitive stance whereby knowledge is constructed by means of words resulting from generalization and abstraction from immediate experience that in this form are then applied to experience to comprehend it. ‘It is one thing’, he says, ‘for to keep a name constantly to the same definition, and another to make it stand everywhere for the same idea: the one is necessary, the other useless and impracticable’ (Berkeley 1967: 58; Intro. §24). Berkeley might well have concurred with Richard von Mises that ‘between exact theories and reality lies a layer of imprecision and “unsayableness” in the exact sense’ [*Zwischen den exakten Theorien und der Wirklichkeit liegt eine Schicht von Ungenauigkeit und von “Unsagbarkeit” im exakten Sinn*], a layer not of logical clarity but of ordinary speech [*Umgangssprache*] (von Mises 1990: 203). Like von Mises or like Otto Neurath, a member of the Vienna Circle, Berkeley wishes to establish a sound epistemological basis for knowledge, a ‘comprehensive scientific attitude’ [*eine umfassende wissenschaftliche Haltung*] rather than merely

vindicate the various foundations of disparate sciences (cf. Neurath 1979: 120). Cassirer too might not object to Berkeley's view that 'in vain do we extend our view into the heavens and pry into the entrails of the earth, in vain do we consult the writings of the learned men and trace the dark footsteps of antiquity'. But he rejected Berkeley's solution to this cognitive futility – that, if language obfuscates truth, then instead 'we need only draw the curtain of words, to behold the fairest tree of knowledge whose fruit is excellent, and within the reach of our hand' (Berkeley 1967: 58; Intro. §24; cf. Cassirer 1977a: 199).

(d.) As a Neo-Kantian thinker Cassirer intends to show that, if symbolic forms could be obviated, 'the inexpressible plenitude of life' would be lost and nothing more than 'a restricted, apathetic, purely sensory consciousness' would enshroud the mind (Cassirer 1977a: 199). Instead he argues that, if language is a symbolic form, then symbolic forms function as a language. What for both form and language constitutes objective reality is a system of signs and images. This both acknowledges the distance [*Entfernung*] between mind and world and offers 'the only possible, adequate *communication* and medium through which any mental being [*geistige Sein*] is for us at all conceivable and intelligible' (Cassirer 1977a: 175–6). Through epistemological reconception Cassirer arrives at a conclusion close to Steiner's or Scheler's through social anthropology: words – as a 'primordial phenomenon' [*Urphänomen*] – are integral to reality. They are 'not a sign or name, not a mental symbol of Being, but [are themselves] a real part of it' [*Das Wort ist nicht eine Bezeichnung und Benennung, nicht ein geistiges Symbol des Seins, sondern es ist selbst ein realer Teil von ihm*] (Cassirer 1988: 56). As with symbolic forms in general, so with language in particular, itself a symbolic form: it is embedded in the reality of human existence. It is the reality of human existence. The human being as a 'language animal', constructs its world from symbolic forms, something akin to what Valéry calls '*fictions*'. Consequently writing – as linguistic construction – is to be valued for extending the *Lebenswelt*, extending the space of collective consciousness, the scope of lived reality, hence of the world itself. As the basis of the intellectual-function, language is the symbolic manifestation of consciousness, both sensation, perception, imagination, rationality, and the subsequent, distanciated reflection on, and evaluation of, these manifestations. Language is thus charged with pragmatism, motivating the apprehensive vigilance of the intellectual-function, justifying its assuming responsibility for knowledge.

Here Cassirer's conception of the Enlightenment sets its own evaluative criteria, not least this symbolic-linguistic reality that produces the very nexus of the intellectual-function. As exemplified *inter alia* by Vico, Rousseau, Hamann, and Herder, what affirms this function is the Enlightenment's interest in the origins of language as a uniquely human reality, both a natural, species-defining attribute and a symbolic means of expression dispensed by divine providence (cf. Cassirer 1988: 91–6). Hamann's assertion that 'reason is language, *logos*' [*Vernunft ist Sprache, λόγος*] captures both dimensions, the mortal and the divine (Cassirer 1988: 94). This antithesis might seem to subvert the intellectual-function. In fact,

it only affirms it. However defined and however self-critical it might be, *Vernunft* (λόγος) was (as Cassirer asserted) above all ‘a constitutional and truth-seeking, primordial force’. As something already there at the beginning, *logos* (the word as ‘primordial phenomenon’, hence language) vindicates its self-determined claim for authority, for writing to be accepted as justifying itself. As reason, it is affirmed by the mind’s discovery of intelligent design in nature that only confirms the need for order and clarity in the self-made human world. If in these antithetical circumstances the intellectual assumes responsibility for the fate of knowledge, desiring it as reassurance for his or her apprehensive vigilance, then he or she needs to discover the perfect conjunction of thinking and writing. In practical terms precisely this perfect conjunction is celebrated by Montesquieu. For him writing is a species-defining human capability and the love of study the sole dependable human occupation. In theoretical terms it is also defined by Berkeley – but in logical-positivistic terms – who wishes ‘that everyone would use his utmost endeavours to obtain a clear view of the ideas he would consider, separating from them all that dross and encumbrance of words which so much contribute to blind the judgment and divide the attention’. He thus clears the way for his conception of the intellectual’s ideal communicative situation defined as follows: ‘Whoever [...] designs to read the following sheets, I entreat him that he would make my words the occasion of his own thinking, and endeavour to attain the *same* train of thoughts in reading that I had in writing them. By this means it will be easy for him to discover the truth or falsity of what I say’ (Berkeley 1967: 62–3; Intro. §24 (my italics)). Here, with language and thought sustaining each other, the desire to know feeds off the concern for words. In this the intellectual finds his or her own conviction. Here the Enlightenment does set evaluative criteria not just for itself but also for recognizing the intellectual’s responsibility for the fate of knowledge. As Cassirer shows, it falls to Modernity to attempt to match them.

(e.) For intellectuals Modernity comes as a dangerous world, a world dangerous to the mind [*esprit*; *Geist*], a world the mind endangers (cf. Valéry 1960: 1059ff.). It discloses that Modernity has failed to vindicate Enlightenment values. At the same time, and for that reason, it provides an occasion for cultural self-reflection, in particular for reflecting on what knowledge might produce existential security, what knowledge in itself would be sufficiently secure. This self-reflection aims to evaluate the circumstances in which the very principle of thought exists. In this way too intellectuals assume responsibility for the fate of knowledge.

Cassirer sees the Enlightenment as an indispensable cognitive form. He is not interested in constructing an eclectic historical narrative of thinkers and their thoughts. Rather he wishes to affirm reason as its essential principle, to define its thought-style, but also to vindicate within its empirical and factual orientation a deeper ‘intrinsic and all-encompassing *form*’ [*eine durchgreifende und übergreifende Form*] (Cassirer 1973: XI, 8). He offers, therefore, not the technical analysis of the scholastic connoisseur, but a symbolic form originating in what the heterogeneous aspects of the Enlightenment as a whole

signify. In this the task of philosophy is crucial. In the eighteenth century (he says) it was meant to be not a separate discipline but the medium animating the various natural and human sciences. It does not remain on the level of ‘mere thinking’ [*das blosse Denken*], but penetrates into that ‘deeper order from which, like thinking, all human *intellectual activity* arises, and in which, according to a fundamental conviction of Enlightenment philosophy, it must be grounded’ (Cassirer 1973: VIII–IX). Thus, as desire for knowledge, the Enlightenment is defined as integral to human existence: thus defined, this desire vindicates its intrinsic cognitive and ethical value whatever historically happens. Apprehension may well continue to define modern culture, but not just because Enlightenment rationalism failed to achieve its ideals, still signs of intellectual and moral self-orientation, but rather because its loss would be irreparable. As Cassirer remarks in his preface, dated October 1932, ‘the century that had seen and venerated in reason and science “the supreme force of human beings” cannot and may not also for us be simply over and lost’. And he adds that ‘a way must be found not only for seeing it in its own structure, but also for liberating again the original forces that brought this structure forth and shaped it’ [*wir müssen einen Weg finden, es nicht nur in seiner eigenen Gestalt zu sehen, sondern auch die ursprünglichen Kräfte wieder frei zu machen, die diese Gestalt hervorgebracht und gebildet haben*] (Cassirer 1973: XIV). In these circumstances, its absence would indicate a dehumanized culture.

3. The Enlightenment: Gauging the decline of Modernity (II)

(a.) In his ‘Préface aux *Lettres persanes*’ (1926) Paul Valéry – one of the most perceptive commentators of Modernity – regards Montesquieu’s epistolary novel as a premonition of cultural decline. As he wrote to the historian, Pierre Gaxotte, in April 1933, in this cognitive situation ‘he had always considered the middle of the XVIIIth century as his chosen epoch’. To him it seemed that ‘everything he liked was present there to the highest degree, and everything he abhorred to the lowest’ (Valéry 1957: 1741).

The value of the Enlightenment within the broad cultural field of Modernity derives for Valéry from the act of reading. Principally this means reading what Montesquieu had written, in this case an epistolary novel, a conventional but aesthetically effective narrative form in the eighteenth century. It also means reading a novel in which, both for the fictional characters and the novel’s readers, writing (i.e. the written correspondence that constitutes the novel) has immediate dramatic force. With wit and humour the epistolary narrative discloses a distanced, estranging perspective on the world otherwise familiar to the eighteenth-century reader, the world he or she normally inhabits. But more is implied here. Writing – for Montesquieu an essentially human vocation as opposed to a civic task – here drives the dynamic of modern reality. It becomes a means of identifying an underlying cultural reality, apprehending a premonition of decline, – as its Modernist reader, Valéry, recognizes.

Montesquieu's novel captures a crisis, that delicately balanced moment when an orderly, civilized world sustained by fictions verges on a disorderly, barbaric regime imposed by facts (i.e. by positivism).

(b.) For Valéry fictive forces are the basis of civilization, since (he asserts) power alone is incapable of imposing purely physical constraints. (He thus confirms here Cassirer's conception of the symbolic nature of human reality.) Civilization depends on order sustained by action creating the presence of absent things, by instincts being counter-balanced by ideals. From this emerges what Valéry calls a 'fiduciary or conventional system'. It introduces imaginary relationships and obstacles between people, the effects of which are decidedly real. Such a system would be expressed through concepts such as what is sacred, just, legal, decent, praiseworthy. These would be reinforced by institutions, such as temples, thrones, tribunals, or theatres, and their respective spectacles, rites, forms, and customs. In their overall effect they 'finish the breaking in of human animals by repressing or measuring their immediate behaviour'. But Valéry insists, this entire structure is purely symbolic: '[I]t subsists on nothing but the power of images and words' [*le tout ne subsiste que par la puissance des images et des mots*]. It imperceptibly distanciates itself from the era of dominant facts. Accordingly weapons give way to symbols and signs as expressions of authority. Forecasts and traditions, as 'imaginary perspectives' on the future and the past, both dominate and restrain the present. The overall effect is that this social world seems as natural as the natural world itself. Yet clearly it works merely by magic. It is an 'edifice built from enchantment' [*un édifice d'enchantements*], precisely because 'it is based on forms of writing, on commands having been obeyed, promises kept, effective images, and habits and conventions observed', – all of them, as Valéry again insists, 'pure fictions', [*ce système qui repose sur des écritures, sur des paroles obéies, des promesses tenues, des images efficaces, des habitudes et des conventions observées – fictions pures*] (Valéry 1957: 509).

In apparently digressing further from Montesquieu's novel, but only the more to close in on its cultural value, Valéry points out that this system is transient, – to both positive and negative effect. The habits, traditions, conventions, social behaviour, and cultural practices it relies on gradually become more complex. In other words, it historicizes itself. The multiplicity of social interconnections pass into history. They refer back to a common origin in long-lost antiquity, to circumstances that will never recur. Hence, no one knows which routes to take or who can follow their commands [*Personne n'en sait plus les parcours et n'en peut suivre les commandes*]. The positive (advantageous) effect is that order is conducive to the freedom of mind [*esprit*]. This freedom then encourages the mind, now no longer bound to the established social order, to question its inconveniences and eccentricities, and so eventually to forget underlying premises. So much rationalization enables human beings to identify themselves with mind [*l'homme se croit esprit*]. This culture flourishes all the more since it is enhanced by the limitless exercises offered by words now separated from actions. But, in the end, it turns against itself. It criticizes the very ideals that

granted intelligence the leisure and the occasions for criticizing them. Rational culture thus compromises its own self-preservation. Consequently, the negative effect of a complex, but restless, self-questioning civilization is its incipient decline into disorder conducive to the regime of the fact. This regime can emerge in an ‘unforeseen way’ and ‘human beings become barbarians of a new type by consequences unanticipated by even their most self-confident thinking’. Valéry here sees civilization mutating into a ‘barbaric régime, both laborious and rigorous’, and ‘more dreadful than ancient forms of barbarity for being more exact and infinitely more powerful’. This is the regime of the *scientific fact*. More daunting than any of its precedents, it negates what Valéry describes as the ‘Vague Things’ [*Choses Vagues*], the basis of societies hitherto. This leads him to wonder if a society that has eliminated everything that is vague and irrational, for the sake of what is measurable and verifiable, can actually subsist. For Valéry this problem exists; its comprehension is urgent. The modern world evinces ‘a continuous growth in precision’ [*Toute l’ère moderne montre un accroissement de la précision*]. ‘Anything that is not sensory cannot become precise and so impedes everything else. It will necessarily be considered increasingly vain and insignificant by contrast’ (Valéry 1957: 510–11).

(c.) So *Lettres persanes* constitutes that ‘delicious moment’ [*moment délicieux*] when order and disorder converge (Valéry 1957: 512). The institutions of culture, society, and government are still imposing. They show no sign of visible alteration, and yet they lack presence, seem exhausted, disrespected, while criticism and scorn deprive them of any further value. At this moment, this coincidence of order and disorder, everything civilized order had suppressed – state-secrets, particular kinds of decency, undisclosed thoughts, long-repressed dreams, the background to human beings who are overexcited and joyfully desperate – are produced and thrown at the ‘public mind’ [*esprit publique*] (Valéry 1957: 512). In fact, Montesquieu’s novel not only represents this convergence, not only becomes a sign of it, but also – significantly – as a symbolic form in itself only fosters the impending disorder (cf. Valéry 1957: 515). It does so by means of a simple narratological device: not the oneiric redescription of reality as, say, in Mercier’s novel, *L’An 2440*, but the foreign visitor, in this case a Persian, who naïvely attempts to make sense of French manners and the institutions supporting them in correspondence both with the French people he meets during his stay and with his Persian friends, courtiers, and household at home (Valéry 1957: 515). This intoxicating cultural atmosphere attracts Valéry to the eighteenth century as his ‘epoch of choice’, – and for reasons here too both positive and negative. Europe (he says, positively) was then the best of all possible worlds; truth still retained some measure; matter and energy did not yet predominate; science was still fairly beautiful, the arts delicate, and religion sustained a balance between capriciousness and rigour. People were well-mannered even in the street; they had a gracious command of language and expressed themselves unlike anyone nowadays. Further, large areas of the world were unexplored; there were intriguing blank spaces on maps. As they

passed, days were not full and rushed, but slow and free; timetables neither fragmented thinking nor enslaved individuals to time and to each other (Valéry 1957: 513). Conversely (negatively) when this culture confronts itself in the system of conventions it is based on, 'it appears comical, sinister, intolerable, almost incredible. Laws, religion, custom and their accoutrements, the wig, the sword, and beliefs all appear as curiosities or as a masquerade, – like items from a fair or from a museum' (Valéry 1957: 515).

Symptomatic of this momentary coincidence in which the regime of fact begins to displace the realm of fiction is that this realm must confront itself. This means not just a *philosophe* holding a mirror up to society. It exposes not just its occlusive preconceptions [*préjugés*]. Rather these actions converge on an ontological concern: how can one be who one is? 'How could anyone be Persian?' [*Comment peut-on être Persan?*] (Montesquieu 1949: 177). This is no question of identity as personal and cultural consistency, by comparison a superficial question. Rather (as Valéry explains) it is a disconcerting experience that surprises people that they should be surprised at what they do and think. It surprises people that they never thought of doing anything different. It is motivated by a pretended or real ingenuity that makes people feel the relativity of civilization and of their habitual confidence in the established Order. And, as Valéry adds, it forecasts the return to some disorder, even does more than just predict it (Valéry 1957: 515). More than this: this issue interrogates the question of subjectivity that cannot exist outside of the words, the *fictions*, that substantiate it. Here the Enlightenment confronts a primordial ontological concern: how are things what they are? Veiled in Montesquieu's 'frivolity', it endorses its foundational tautology: that the proper study of Mankind *should* be Man. This question might have been less arresting if 'proper study' had pre-empted it. The vindication of proper study: that also defines the social intellectual-function.

(d.) The 'Préface' concludes by focussing on the novel itself. For Valéry it testifies to the freedom of thought available in the 1720s that a serious principal magistrate of the court of appeal, a political philosopher, and academician, could write such 'frivolous letters' without that detracting from his professional status and authority (Valéry 1957: 516). (But perhaps not complete freedom. The first edition (1721), though claiming to be published in Cologne, actually appeared in a freer Amsterdam (Montesquieu 1949: 1583).) More importantly, for Valéry it signifies how impoverished the modern era is, how inferior culturally to the Enlightenment. This insight comes from the act of reading. Reading produces illumination; it shines a spotlight on the prevailing cultural circumstances. *Lettres persanes* enables its reader to appreciate that the modern regime of facts is antipathetic towards the act of reading, to realize that this regime disrupts the deep concentration reading requires, and treats as offensive even the least intellectual effort it demands (ibid.). Reviewing Montesquieu's rhetorical virtuosity, surely a consummate expression of the love of words, Valéry argues that the amount of clarity invested in a book is related inevitably and involuntarily to its implied reader, here the reader Montesquieu envisages and constructs through the act of

writing. Stylistically and intellectually he foresaw his readers as ‘a little more versatile than their modern counterparts’: he was both offering them the pleasure of elegant intelligence, and attributing to them what they needed for enjoying it [*il prévoit des esprits un peu plus déliés que les nôtres; il leur offre les plaisirs de l’intelligence élégante et leur prête ce qui leur faut pour en jouir*]. But he made no allowances for modern readers. As someone who regarded reading as enlightening and therapeutic, he could not have imagined that they would be so primitive [*Il n’écrit pas pour nous, qu’il ne croyait pas si primitifs*]. In other words, ‘Montesquieu did not entertain the kind of readers we are’ [*Montesquieu n’a pas entretenu les lecteurs que nous sommes*] (ibid.).

Valéry sees the Enlightenment as an ideal cultural ethos. But the (historically) unforeseen, not to mention the unforeseeable, intensifies his apprehension. It is the mind’s fatal ‘blind spot’, a radical flaw not just in intellectual culture, but in Modernity in general particularly because of its constitutive asynchronous, heterogeneous value-cultures. Moreover, at the heart of the culture of Modernity this crisis means that its thinking potentially negates the ‘principal purpose of thought’: that is, as mentioned earlier, ‘to know and to foresee in order to act’ (Mannheim 2014b: 160). As Valéry remarks (parodying Descartes): ‘I foresee, therefore I deceive myself’ [*Je prévois, donc je me trompe*] (cf. Valéry 1960: 1068).

(e.) Already a determining characteristic of Modernity, this crisis also haunts its Enlightenment component in particular. It testifies to a convergence of cognitive situations evident both *post festum* in Valéry’s comments on *Lettres persanes* and – significantly – in Montesquieu himself. Besides these parallels other characteristics also define both cognitive situations. For both Montesquieu and Valéry the crisis of the unforeseen ruptures any historical continuity between the past and the expected future. For both too it also subverts the principal purpose of thinking. Further, though Montesquieu and Valéry doubt the value of history, they are aware of the decline of civilizations. For Valéry the First World War induced it. It convinced him, as in his essay, *La Crise de l’Esprit* [‘The Crisis of the Mind’] (1919), that all civilizations are mortal [*nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles*]: that nothing now protected European civilization from the fate of Elam, Nineveh, or Babylon (Valéry 1957: 988).⁶ For Montesquieu it is the fascination – affirmed by many contemporary *philosophes* and historians – with the decline of the Roman Empire with its tendency towards self-destruction coinciding with the principles – recognized by the Enlightenment – of a humanistic culture.

4. Locations of the intellectual: Configurations of mind

(a.) Intellectuals are not in principle ‘a socially free-floating intelligence’ [*sozial freischwebende Intelligenz*], be they ‘libertines of the mind’ sabotaging any existing value-culture (according to Alfred Weber), be they involved in intellectual practice that masks its class basis (cf. Weber 1953: 58; Mannheim

1995: 135–40). Rather they are ‘representatives of the mind’ [*Geist; esprit*]. The intellectual is motivated not just by the ‘universal’ as a cultural value, but more so by its cognitive capacity – in other words, by the mind [*Geist; esprit*]. As Montesquieu and Dumarsais confirm, mind is universal: it is the human capacity for producing social forms and cultural values. So in Montesquieu’s case, law is universal, systematic, but still diverse. He explores the diverse cultural values informing the mental characteristics [*l’esprit*] informing different legal systems. In Dumarsais the rationalism (an expression of mind) informing and monitoring the *philosophe*’s personal conduct differentiates it from the all-pervasive social behaviour enmeshed in opinion, superstition, and theological dogma.

But mind (*Geist; esprit*) has further significance. It connects the intellectual to culture and society. The more developed the intellectual’s cognitive situation, the more extensive the scope of his or her cultural appreciation, the more varied the semantic and conceptual fields he or she creates for expressing it. This situation validates itself. It arises from Jakob Burckhardt’s *Observations on World History* [*Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*] (1868/1870), from his re-evaluation of the philosophy of history superseding Hegel and Droysen. Burckhardt focusses in history not on the past [*das Vergangene*] but on ‘what is recurrent, constant, and typical as resonating in us and being intelligible to us’ [*wir betrachten das sich Wiederholende, Konstante, Typische als ein in uns Anklingendes und Verständliches*] (Burckhardt 1969: 6 (emphasis in original)). He cites Herder as a precedent, an allusion to his *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity* [*Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*] (1784–1791) and the concept of ‘humanity’, its constant theme. Mind, then, has two fundamental aspects. As history shows, it is ‘mutable, determined, impermanent’ and ultimately engulfed by history. But then, in whatever happens, there is a mental aspect that makes it unchangeable. The mind, says Burckhardt, ‘possesses mutability but not transience’ [*der Geist hat Wandelbarkeit, aber nicht Vergänglichkeit*] (Burckhardt 1969: 7). It is, therefore, worth insisting that if the historian responds to the mind as something superficial and transient, the intellectual focusses on what in its mutability is constant and typical.

Unlike the historian, then, the intellectual is a ‘representative of the mind’ [*ein Răpresentant des Geistes*] (Burckhardt 1969: 213). As something abstract, ideal, *eutopian*, mind manifests itself in symbolic forms, in the transvaluation of accepted values. These are realized in the intellectual-function, a type both of cognitive practice and social behaviour.

It is embedded in the manifold, heterogeneous inter-connections (*rappports*) between individuals, societies, cultures, religions, and ethnicities human beings have created for themselves as their own world. These inter-connections can, amongst others, be social-psychological (identity, social behaviour); cultural (mental and ethical predispositions); socio-economic (varieties of work), not just local, but also national, even global in scope. Intellectuals are ideally placed to respond to the dynamics of conflicting social trends and values within them, to adopt vigilance as a cognitive stance. They keep watch on these symbolic

forms and fictions, on their shifting discursive configurations, on their constantly mutating strategies of technocratic management. In the inter-personal spaces these connections generate, the world the scope of consciousness encompasses, they are alert to its inherent pathogenic tendencies. After all, someone does have to keep watch, someone does have to do it.

That the works of the *philosophes* are easily available indicates how deeply embedded in this world intellectuals are. Their works still inform methodologies in the humanities as academic disciplines. Though historically labelled as 'Enlightenment', they still are challenging in their modern appearance. Yet this being 'historically labelled' leaves them subject to historicization, contained in their historical 'context' as a means of underscoring their 'continuing relevance'. Yet if the works of the *philosophes* still inform philosophical and cultural discourse, they must derive their truth from an agency that transcends its historical 'context', from the mind itself, from its constant, recurrent manifestations. To project Enlightened thinking onto history, to formulate it historiographically, and to harness it to historicism (be it naïve or sophisticated), limits its scope by postponing its promise.

Sceptical towards historical knowledge, Montesquieu disseminated enlightened thinking based on an understanding of cultural-anthropological forms of behaviour as revealed in forms of law and governance. His political commitment as an intellectual is expressed pragmatically in the human capacity for enacting laws, for thereby realizing ideas as an expression of mind, *De l'Esprit des lois*. In any case, within this conceptual field ideas apparently invalidated by historicization just go into hibernation pending their retrieval and re-functioning. Having been historicized, ideas 'of their time', 'in their time' would not for that very reason have disclosed their full cognitive potential. Montesquieu in *Lettres persanes* had already exposed the fallacy committed by journalists in talking about new books as though truth had always to be something new, the latest historical thing. Rather (he adds) until they have read all the ancient books, they have no reason at all for preferring the new (i.e. modern) ones (Montesquieu 1949: 292). Rather than have mind articulated in and through history, thereby anticipating Hegel, he sees it as something constant, something perpetual, something that can go against the age, something 'unseasonal'.

(b.) From wherever the intellectual is located, his or her response is not just 'to think in order to know and foresee in order to act' (as Mannheim asserted). It is also thereby to realize. As the outcome of the intellectual's vigilance, 'realization' here implies two complementary meanings: 'to realize' as suddenly becoming aware of a critical situation; 'realization' as making what is abstract, eidetic, or imaginary into something empirically present, into an incontrovertible issue. It depends on these forms of cognitive behaviour accountable both to itself and to the world: *comprehension* (cf. 'know'), *apprehension* (cf. 'foresee'), *commitment* (cf. 'act'), *responsibility* (cf. 'principal purpose of thought').

Comprehension means the intellectual's need to understand the world and his or her situation in it. For that purpose it also means the

intellectual acquiring the broadest, most inclusive knowledge (as opposed to the mind contained by academic orthodoxy as a pseudo-comprehensivity). Montesquieu's *Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les esprits et les caractères* ['Essay on the Causes that can affect Minds and Characters'] (anticipating *De l'Esprit des lois*) accounts for the character of the intellectual [*l'homme d'esprit*], a significant undertaking since, as he says, 'mind [...] is the principal attribute of our modern times' [*l'esprit [...] est l'attribut principal de nos temps modernes*] (Montesquieu 1951: 58). The intellectual's initial education has two components: academic [*maîtres*] and people of the social world [*gens du monde*], the former having 'intrinsic value', the latter the 'value of opinion'. Further, the intellectual is, therefore, 'intuitively aware just when he should act on what he knows'. Consequently, 'he creates himself at each moment in his reaction to the present need; he knows what the just connection is between things and himself'. But this worldly, sensory knowledge still falls short of comprehension. What many regard as knowledge is for him merely sensory. He is more perceptive: '[W]hat for most is mute, speaks to him and is a source of instruction for him'. Some may be responsive to the face, some to physiognomy, some even to the soul. Even so the intellectual's mind is more inclusive and superior: so 'one can say that the silly person lives only with the body; intellectuals live with intelligence' [*On peut dire qu'un sot ne vit qu'avec les corps; les gens d'esprit vivent avec les intelligences*] (Montesquieu 1951: 57). Comprehension means, in other words, that the intellectual's scope is universal but also, therefore, quite rare. He has to combine within himself two almost incompatible qualities signifying a difference as great as that between an intellectual and someone unintelligent: the stance of the intellectual in society coordinating the most disparate assortment of ideas, and the stance of the mind amongst philosophers themselves discriminating between them, avoiding confusion through clarity and order (Montesquieu 1951: 57–8).

But from this situation arises a further form of education, a 'general education' [*éducation générale*] – something like Marx's 'general intellect' it is tempting to conjecture – provided by society, by the general character [*caractère générale*] of each nation fostered by physical factors such as climate and by moral factors such as laws, religion, customs, manners, and fashions (Montesquieu 1951: 58).⁷ Ultimately, though, comprehension is not just theoretical, involving personal attitude and a corresponding methodology. It is also practical, not only encompassing global knowledge, of past and present dynasties and empires, of recent European politics, and current affairs in France, but also in the 1720s travelling and directly observing local customs, manners, and practices, as in *Voyage de Gratz à La Haye* [*Journey from Gratz to the Hague*]. Just how people live together, what connections they form between each other informs his whole work, affirmed by his comment that 'books are a type of society that one provides for oneself; but each person chooses them after his or her own fashion' [*Les livres sont une espèce de société qu'on se donne; mais chacun les choisit à sa mode*] (Montesquieu 1951: 62).

Apprehension. Comprehension would be merely self-serving, if it were not committed to anything beyond itself. It indicates intellectual self-confidence. It suggests that ‘everything’ can be known, that personal knowledge can be exhaustive. It underpins expertise. Apprehension, by contrast, is intuitive, symptomatic of existential vulnerability, sustained by vigilance, propelled by dissidence. It is haunted by a radical, cognitive misgiving: however much anyone claims to know, something fatefully unforeseen is bound to occur. Its vigilance is governed by two numinous entities the intellectual [*homme d’esprit; philosophe*] keeps scanning, keeps opposing, but never controlling: the one historical, the other the ‘social mind’. The historical entity is the ‘age’: like numerous modern intellectuals, Montesquieu is motivated by the need to know ‘the spirit of the century’ [*le génie du siècle*], to diagnose its psychopathology. Since it arises from the misjudgements of those who failed to understand the society they lived in, this knowledge is essential for maintaining by contrast one’s own personal reputation. In the same essay *De la Considération et de la Réputation* [On Consideration and Reputation] (1725) the entity of the ‘social mind’ is its dominant prejudices (*préjugés*), its automatic cognitive pre-emptions. These consist of politics and superstition blended together by vanity as a means of gaining a reputation without effort but also without virtue (Montesquieu 1949: 125). Thus Montesquieu confronts a world in which the connections (*rappports*) between people are unstable and deceptive in many respects: personally, socially, and politically, as his literary works confirm.

Commitment. Writing, so this argument proposes, justifies itself. It exhibits in itself a concern for order and clarity of thought, for imaginatively challenging preconceptions, for reviewing society’s self-knowledge. Because public discourse, the prevailing public opinion, is inadequate for personal and social self-reflection, the intellectual’s vigilance is received as discomfiting dissent. But his or her exploration of radical issues cannot be anything else. *De l’Esprit des lois* explores the very basis of human coexistence, in society, in the state, and in the international society of states, such is the power and authority of writing. It, like the intellectual in general, embodies the search for, and formation of, something better. Montesquieu states that he would believe himself to be the most happy of mortals if he could enable human beings to cure themselves of their prejudices (*préjugés*). By prejudices he means ‘not that which leaves one in ignorance about certain things, but that which leaves one in ignorance about oneself’ (Montesquieu 1951: 230).

Responsibility. To realize this commitment, to sustain his or her vigilance, to identify the sources of apprehension the intellectual needs to maintain the cognitive conditions facilitating these intentions. This is his or her responsibility. This involves the constant revision of his or her comprehensive knowledge as the foundation of personal commitment. It also requires caring about language, about the means by which this commitment – an existential commitment – is enacted. In other words, in the conceptual field of Modernity (let alone in the Enlightenment’s in particular) the need to write and to enlighten, to understand the modern world as a whole and so achieve some reassurance, is sustained

by observations and commentaries arising from distancing self-reflection, – as evinced, for example, in *Mes pensées* and *Spicilège*, both works testifying to the encyclopaedic scope and sharp perspicacity of Montesquieu's mind.

(c.) Appealing in this way to the human being rather than the citizen, the intellectual inculcates apprehensive vigilance as a mental habit, as an unsatiated desire for knowledge. What he or she writes with this purpose in mind is offered to the public, not as self-inflating universalism, but as something for any human being to know through reading what has been written, because language itself is a universal human capacity, – because 'man is a *zoon phonanta*, a language animal', because language is a 'primordial phenomenon' [*Das Wort ist Urphänomen*] (Steiner 1975: 73; Scheler 1955c: 183). With the habit of vigilance, the intellectual is uniquely aware that 'life proceeds amid an incessant network of signals', since 'meaning [...] is the essence, the underlying structure of natural forms', so that, therefore, 'almost every phenomenon can be "read" and classed as a statement' (Steiner 1975: 66). Further, the intellectual is committed to vigilance because the writing affirming it depends on 'the decisive recognition that *language* and *man* are correlate, that they imply and necessitate each other'. As structural anthropology shows and Cassirer's conception of symbolic forms confirms, the foundation of society and culture reveals that 'language forms quite literally underlie and perpetuate human behaviour' (Steiner 1975: 70–1).

The intellectual-function can, therefore, be more closely defined. Its authority derives from its concern with language as a universal capacity. And this capacity is only enhanced by the intellectual's incessant quest for knowledge, his love of study, as existential responses to his or her apprehensive vigilance. By way of anecdotal illustration, various modern intellectuals – in the broadly accepted sense – can be defined by their interest in the connection between human existence and language forms: (e.g.) Dumarsais with *Des Tropes ou des différents sens* [*On Tropes or on Different Meanings*] (1730), Voltaire with his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764–1769), Rousseau with his *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (1781), J.G. Herder with *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* [*Treatise on the Origin of Language*] (1771), Karl Kraus with *Die Sprache* (1937), Walter Benjamin with 'Über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' [*On the Task of the Translator*] (1923), George Orwell with 'Politics and the English Language' (1946), Sartre with *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* [*What Is Literature?*] (1948), Chomsky with *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (1966), George Steiner with *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975). Though arbitrarily selected, these figures in their arbitrariness, in their heterogeneity, suggest a philological basis for the intellectual-function, a basis in the sense that philology, indicating – besides a 'love of studying' – a 'fondness for words', indispensable for writing, actually sustains it. Apprehensive vigilance, the existential desire for knowledge depends on language constituting the reality in which human beings live. With his or her concern for words, at the same time with his or her reasoned self-justification (*logos*), the intellectual is obliged to reformulate what

constitutes reality, to sabotage the historicizing jargon enforcing the way things are as the way they have got to be, to dissent from the dominant culture of critical discourse because it is ‘the latent but mobilizable infrastructure of modern “technical” languages’ (Gouldner 1979: 28). Losing this capacity invokes the inhuman. Victor Klemperer’s account of the insidious ‘nazification’ of German in the Third Reich offers a classic example of it (cf. Klemperer 2007). The fate of language is a most sensitive seismograph of social havoc.

(d.) The aim of the intellectual is to *realize*. This, and the rationalization supporting it, inform the tropes evinced in the intellectual-function. They thereby justify his or her dissident purpose. And it needs justifying since realization involves a constant re-evaluation of prevailing values. With his or her being apprehensive, what the intellectual realizes exceeds what is commonly, often unthinkingly, accepted. Further, this cognitive situation has a heroic quality, as Carlyle, rejecting the sceptical materialism of the Enlightenment, himself realized. He describes the ‘Man of Letters’, ‘altogether a product of these new ages’ as ‘our most important modern person’ (Carlyle n.d.a: 377–8). He is the latest avatar of the heroic divinities, prophets, poets, and priests of old. He often works in austere, impoverished circumstances, inspired by the books he reads, writing as much for posterity that will not know him as for the present public that ignores him. More than this, his very existence is based on the premise of Modernity, on what needs to be realized and substantiated: ‘the *Thought* of man; the true thaumaturgic virtue; by which man works all things whatsoever’, since ‘all that he does, and brings to pass, is the vesture of a *Thought*’ (Carlyle n.d.a: 387 (emphasis on original)). More still, beyond the built, urban environment writing books, traces of black ink on bits of paper, ‘is the purest embodiment a *Thought* of man can have’ (Carlyle n.d.a: 388). Consequently, ‘the Priesthood of the Writers of Books’, superseding in importance all other social classes, would have a positive social influence, even redeem the Enlightenment, if it could organize itself, if it could ‘set its *light* on high places to walk thereby’, rather than to waste it, since ‘Light is the one thing wanted for the world’ (Carlyle n.d.a: 391).

(e.) Compelled by apprehension and responsibility, by the need to substantiate his reasons for critique, and instead of indulging him- or herself in lofty idealism, the intellectual concentrates on something universally pragmatic that is its unique domain, *logos*. Hence, the vocation of the intellectual is about how to do things with words: to speak truth to power (Said 1994: 71); ‘to tell the truth and explore the lies’ (Chomsky 1969d: 257); and thereby to defend the integrity of language; to be a point of illumination in an otherwise murky, ideologically corrupted, and rhetorically treacherous public sphere. He or she exposes the false reasoning of those in power. Hence, the intellectual’s responsibility for language. That is the reality the most marginalized shares with the most powerful. Certainly the discourse of the powerful might predominate, but the intellectual can draw on resources and information that can deconstruct it and propose by means of his or her dissidence different ways of personal

re-orientation. Where academic expertise seeks to improve existing knowledge, thus proving self-serving, the intellectual speaks with others, lending them a voice on their behalf (cf. Chomsky 1969d: 271–2).

(f.) Sartre's (and others') ostensibly useful distinction between *technicien de l'universel* and the *technicien du savoir pratique* is actually misleading. It asserts a misconception: the intellectual as advocating universals, lofty but impracticable ideas; the technician with instrumental technical knowledge that is immediately useful, that can shape the world in its image. It requires a further distinction. This concerns the individual's attitude towards the knowledge he or she has, what value it has for him or her, and consequently what purposes it might serve. Sartre nevertheless illustrates the significance of attitude and value. His Marxist interpretation acknowledges that bourgeois society cultivates for itself its 'general intellect'. It recognizes that from this practice the intellectual-function arises organically. Its self-reflective capacity both exposes the contradictions in bourgeois society and recognizes that it proclaims universal human values to redeem itself. The intellectual internalizes these social fault-lines, 'meddling with what is not his business', 'the monstrous product of a monstrous society' (Sartre 1972: 38, 41, 44).

'Universal', though, is suspect because the indispensable values it affirms – such as freedom, justice, equality, reason – are vulnerable to ideological distortion. In some respects it is as if they exist so as to be ideologically distorted. As in Jean-François Lyotard's *Intellectual's Tomb and Other Essays* [*Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers*] (1984) it succumbs to a Postmodern relativism. It is subverted by the synchronized asynchronicities and the heterogeneity of facts and values characteristic of Modernity. One remedy, as Rousseau argued, sees humanity as *the* universal value that needs to be assimilated to nature, a more comprehensive value still (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1996: 52). That, as Dumarsais and Montesquieu also acknowledged, would affirm its underlying cultural-anthropological diversity. Certainly, as Sartre argues, 'the universal has perpetually to be made' (Sartre 1972: 49). That remaking also applies to the intellectual as a 'representative of the mind' offering a diagnosis of specific situations in a pathogenic culture and so extrapolating from it its more general condition.

By definition the intellectual has to be antagonistic. Inevitably, therefore, that function finds itself contested. To define the intellectual in terms solely of universals puts him or her in danger of being overtaken by the 'practical technician', just as scholastic philosophy was superseded by Bacon's reductive empiricism (as Macauley remarked). The engineer and the technician do hold power (as, e.g. Spengler and Ortega y Gasset realized). They have their own universal vocation, expressed in the numerical language and formulae indispensable to the natural sciences, mathematics, and technology. Further, with its self-serving and self-understanding orientation – in both the natural and the human sciences – it removes knowledge from ordinary experience (cf. Chomsky 1969d: 271–2). It disqualifies all other opinions not derived from specialized, professional work.

Further, common to both intellectual knowledge and technical expertise is the risk of cognitive redundancy. So much knowledge is produced that it makes itself redundant. Like Waddington (as mentioned earlier), Shils remarks that ‘so many books are published, and journals go on multiplying past the capacity of any one human mind, even a moderately specialized mind, to survey and pass on their contents’ (Shils 1972: 117; cf. Waddington 1977: 33). To this can be added another form of redundancy, a devaluation of mind due to its broad social functionality, deriving from the conviction that ‘we have now entered a period in which there may be more educated manpower than there is demand for’ (Gouldner 1979: 67). Most strikingly universities are the main contributors to this devaluation of cognitive values. Thus a transvaluation of values occurs. The expansion of one particular aspect of the modern cognitive situation, namely *savoir-faire*, the instrumentalization of knowledge, sequesters knowledge about this world [*savoir (que)*] while eliminating existential self-knowledge [*savoir être*] (cf. Schlanger 1990: 89–91).

The fate of knowledge is not automatically conducive to disseminating Enlightenment. If it means a science-based society, the value of humanism it projects must surely be supported by more than piecemeal problem-solving (cf. Pinker 2018: *passim*). As Mark Pattison remarked more than a century ago, there has been material progress, but for ‘humanity as socially embodied, the evidence of progress becomes much less distinct’. For one thing, ‘to live at all is a struggle’, so that ‘to keep within reach of the material advantages which it is the boast of our century to have provided is a competition in which only the strong can succeed – the many fail’. For another, ‘refinement in the individual intensifies the pains of life, and refinement in society multiplies the things which it is necessary to keep out of sight’. Hence his conclusion, the redundancy of social effort and the knowledge propelling it: ‘[P]rosperity means the rapid growth of population; and numbers mean an internecine fight for a share in the earth’s produce’. The result – paradoxically: ‘[A] prolonged prosperity is necessarily suicidal, and progress inevitably destroys itself by mere progression’ (Pattison 1877: 357). Thus the ‘age of reason’ negates itself. The apparently comprehensive scope of intellectual activity might well suggest a productive, expansive knowledge-culture. That does not mean that society is becoming more intelligent as it becomes more complex. It might mean it becoming less. Comparatively speaking, no one can absorb the available and increasing stock of knowledge. No one commands the totality of the available ‘general intellect’. The fate of knowledge is thus to become redundant. Producing knowledge is to produce its redundancy, ‘clever’ behaviour without the intellectual-function. Modernity must, therefore, constantly reassess its potential in the light of developments in the natural and human sciences. It signifies a culture in which, paradoxically, the development of knowledge impedes the self-assertion of the Enlightenment.

Besides subversion by the practical technician, the reflective intellectual is also tempted by his or her socio-political effectiveness and its jargon of actuality. The difference between these mental functions is not necessarily so noticeable. It

is one aspect of what Julien Benda called the *trahison des clercs* [the betrayal of the intellectuals]: the intellectual going with whatever – socially, culturally, politically – happens to be going. Both functions can be covered by what Edward Said calls ‘professionalism’, the conversion of the human being into the citizen, the reversal of Montesquieu’s function when writing, the conversion of himself as citizen into himself as human being. Said defines it as ‘thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living, between the hours of nine and five with one eye on the clock’. The other eye is on ‘what is considered to be proper, professional behaviour – not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and “objective”’ (Said 1994: 55). This evaluation develops Benda’s argument for the intellectual’s betrayal of his or her vocation – that ‘the modern world has made the intellectual [*clerc*] into a citizen [*citoyen*] subject to all the charges attached to this title and has thereby made the contempt of the passions of the laity [*le mépris des passions laïques*] much more difficult for him than for his elders’ (Benda 1977: 299). Here too Said and Benda also connect with Whitehead’s critique of professional knowledge-management. Professional knowledge he defines as ‘effective knowledge [...], supported by a restricted acquaintance with useful subjects subservient to it’. He does, though, tellingly see it as dangerous: ‘It produces minds in a groove. Each profession makes progress, but it is progress in its own groove’. It is dangerous because ‘there is no groove of abstractions which is adequate for the comprehension of human life’. Whitehead discovers in professionalization a crucial existential knowledge deficit, resulting from ‘the restraint of serious thought within a groove’, so that ‘the remainder of life is treated superficially, with the imperfect categories of thought derived from one profession’ (Whitehead 1967a: 197). This tension between the intellectual and the technical specialist arises, as Gay points out, within the conceptual field of the Enlightenment as one form of knowledge cancelling another: ‘the man who understands and by understanding, masters nature’ is thereby ‘driving out the old and desirable idea: Renaissance man’. It would be more accurate to say that this tension indicates a transvaluation of values symptomatic of divergent cognitive attitudes towards the knowledge one has, given that ‘scientific thinking exacted the stripping away of theological, metaphysical, aesthetic, and ethical admixtures that had been a constituent part of science since the Greeks; scientific philosophers of the eighteenth century, with justice, treated these admixtures as impurities, as survival from earlier stages of consciousness’ (Gay 1979: 158, 160). Gay as a historian thus affirms specialization. He avoids the problematic social role of the intellectual. He already resembles the specialized mind he recognizes.

(g.) If the intellectual arises organically from academic specialization, he or she can relapse into it or lose him- or herself in dissenting from it. However, within the intellectual’s cognitive scope itself errancy proves a temptation if not a risk. The love of knowledge informing the intellectual’s apprehensive vigilance can mutate into, and be distracted by, insatiable curiosity. For Montesquieu,

study, a therapeutic activity, desire for knowledge a natural proclivity of the mind, in Faust turn frustrating, malignant. It confirms the mentality produced by a historicized world itself produced by capitalist culture obsessed with the latest thing, this latest thing automatically consigning all preceding things to obsolescence, to history. It offsets the production of progressively redundant knowledge with the remorseless drive for discovering and experiencing new things. The search for knowledge, which seems something undertaken consciously, now appears as a drive, something pathologically compulsive, something diabolical.

Specifically, 'curiosity' ranges from being inquisitive into what is not meant to be seen (and for that reason may be enlightening) to the quest for what is new (something yet to be discovered, something unanticipated with an enlightening impact). This latter motivation is confirmed by the German word for 'curiosity', *Neugierde*, and for 'curious', *neugierig*, both meaning the 'desire' [*Begierde*], the state of being 'greedy' [*gierig*], for what is new [*neu*]. As a basic cognitive stance this is personified in the many legends surrounding the figure of Faust. Through Goethe's interpretation it is particularly relevant both to the validity of the Enlightenment and, therefore, to the fate of knowledge within Modernity's conceptual field. The *philosophes* might well be socially vigilant, surveying the wide diversity of human culture. By contrast Faust is driven by the remorseless, self-imposed imperative 'to discover what in its innermost holds the world together' [*Daß ich erkenne, was die Welt/Im innersten zusammenhält*]. But he is left frustrated, his studies having proved unenlightening and he himself 'a poor fool/only as clever as before!' [*Da steh' ich nun, ich armer Tor,/ Und bin so klug als wie zuvor!*] (Goethe 1963: 20; ll.358–9, 382–3). His despondency is so severe that he would overcome it by rejecting his musty books and papers, their scholastic erudition, turning to magic to penetrate further and immediately into nature. It is as if Goethe had already recognized in the Enlightenment the risk of an obsessive curiosity that, being self-serving, knew no bounds and would, therefore, be self-incriminating and ultimately destructive. To this end Mephistopheles is the nihilistic satanical spirit of a historicized world once present at the moment of Creation, now expressing itself in cynical appraisals of human intellectual achievements in subsequent history.

Within the conceptual field of Modernity Faust also represents what intellectuals – those who have not relapsed into technical expertise or been mesmerized by curiosity – in different ways diagnosed as pathogenic. In "Mon Faust" [1940], a series of theatrical sketches, Valéry undertakes from the standpoint of Mephistopheles a devastating critique of the achievements of human mind and thought. Far from representing something satanic, Mephistopheles is impressed that the human mind can be so badly maladjusted to human existence that it exceeds his own corruptive function. No wonder, then, that in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* [*The Decline of the West*] (1923) Oswald Spengler sees modern culture as Faustian culture, the terminal culture of the Western world. Faustian culture is dynamic, its energy generated by its desire to know (Spengler 1977: 482ff.; 545–70). It projects itself onto the most remote temporal distance: it

is a will to infinity, the expression of Faust's 'mind that unrestricted always rushes onward' [[*ein*] *Geist* [...]/*Der ungebündigt immer vorwärts dringt*] (Spengler 1976: 993; Goethe 1963: 61; ll.1856–7). But as it does so entropy increases. The Faustian will to know might well stop at nothing: when it stops there will be nothing. Symptomatic of its exhaustion is the increase in specialization in the exact sciences approaching self-destruction through the refinement of their perspective and methods, the cadre of technical experts and specialists already signifying the decline of the community of clerics (Spengler 1977: 423, 433, 548). At the same time – and this is where Spengler's criticism bites – the exhausted will for knowledge also meets resistance from the masses, from the presence of democracy and capital, from the hegemony of opinions and prejudices (Spengler: 1977: 446–60; Spengler 1976: 1004, 1058–9). Similarly the will for knowledge, driven by curiosity, dismisses the Enlightenment – itself not unaccustomed to what Hans Blumenberg termed 'theoretical curiosity' – as the rationalist expression of critical understanding, as a *Weltanschauung*, rather than as an expression of potentially the all-encompassing mind [*Geist*] (Spengler 1976: 934–8). That the Enlightenment is here superseded by Faustian curiosity, by the will to know at any cost, confirms the inference from Goethe's *Faust* that the urge to be enlightened, however tempting, does incur mortal risks.

(h.) So the Enlightenment does matter. It is always actual. Its conceptual field offers a scene of conflict not just about what knowledge is for, but also about its very fate, what it may lead to. Faust's compact with Mephistopheles evinces in his despondency a 'reckless mind' (to borrow Mark Lilla's phrase (cf. Lilla 2001)). Faust deludes himself if he thinks he can subdue him and his power for his own purposes. This too is a *trahison des clercs* by the clerics themselves. Its precedent is the notion of the philosopher king in Plato's *Republic* as the ideal of virtuous governance (a type recognized, e.g. by Dumarsais). However, intellectuals who compromise themselves by thus affirming existing political powers compromise the entire social intellectual-function, in particular his or her responsibility for the fate of knowledge. That is to say: within the social intellectual-function itself there are conflicting attitudes to, and formations of, the purpose and value of knowledge, – as these somewhat random examples demonstrate:

The idea of the philosopher king is ultimately compromising: Plato, falling from favour, sold into slavery by Dionysus, the tyrant of Syracuse; Aristotle the tutor of the future Alexander the Great at the court of Philip II of Macedon; Heidegger's unrepentant self-identification with the political and cultural aims of the Third Reich. For a time this relationship can work if the monarch conceives of him- or herself as a patron of the arts: Descartes' fatal stay in Sweden on the invitation of Queen Christina; Voltaire's ultimately disastrous period at the court of Frederick the Great; by contrast Diderot receiving generous financial support from Catherine the Great exemplified also by his stay in Saint Petersburg. But a monarch acting with the notion of the philosopher king in mind can also offer security to those persecuted for their ideas, as in the case of La Mettrie finding at the court of Frederick the Great refuge from persecution

by critics of his radical materialism. But if these relationships fail, the fault might not lie with the monarch but with a naïve or misplaced trust in reason. Régis Debray sees this in those whom he calls ‘martyrs of ancient rationality that their faith has disarmed and left [...] defenceless’ such as Condorcet and Lavoisier guillotined in the French Revolution, Walter Benjamin and Stefan Zweig forced into exile by the Second World War and Jewish persecution and thereafter committing suicide (Debray 2006: 180–1). Conversely Goethe’s almost life-long, productive involvement in Weimar with the court of Duke Karl August suggests that intellectuals can under almost unique circumstances work with the politically powerful. Nevertheless, as German experience shows, it can set a dangerous precedent for intellectuals subsequently to cooperate with less amenable political power.

Currently, though, the university is the primary institution for connecting the academic to political objectives. In his criticism of American foreign policy in the Far East in the 1960s, Chomsky revealed how crucial it was that the ‘new mandarins’, the academics, specialists in the human sciences, experts in physics, chemistry, and technology in general, identified with and facilitated this policy. His intention was to expose the hypocrisy, the deceitfulness, and cynicism of the academic, political, military, and industrial élites: ‘It is frightening’, he says in ‘Some Thoughts on Intellectuals and the Schools’ (1966), ‘to observe the comparative indifference of American intellectuals to the immediate actions of their government and its long-range policies, and their frequent willingness – often eagerness – to play a role in implementing these policies’ (Chomsky 1969c: 249). The same inference applies to the commercialization of UK universities a quarter of a century later. Far from defending universities against their marketization, academics seize the opportunity to establish research institutes as an income-stream for their institution and for their own ambitious self-promotion. There is, it seems, a constitutional flaw, an ingrained fallibility in academic knowledge, that it easily capitulates to being instrumentalized, – as Schopenhauer claimed with regard to the teaching of philosophy: academics, he observes, are all too ready to operate as ‘cogs suitable for keeping in motion the great machine of the state, the ultimate goal of all goods’ (Schopenhauer 1977: 182; cf Davies 2018: 32).

Intellectuals, be they misguided or conceited, endorse political power for its patronage, not least as a means of putting their thinking directly into action. But existing powers employ a countervailing strategy. They patronize the intellectual by authorizing his or her social function as a ‘public intellectual’. Instead of representing dissident dissociation from society, the intellectual-function is allocated by those who manage dominant discourses a marginal space within the way things are, the way historically they had got to be. It takes a further step to tame the intellectual, as – ironically – in the current-affairs magazine *Prospect* that conducts surveys to discover which public intellectual is the ‘most popular’. This effectively neutralizes dissidence and reservation, if not in the case of the intellectuals themselves who may well refuse any facile popularity, at least for the readers of the magazine lest their complacency be disturbed.

This situation perfectly illustrates Benda's remark: '[O]ne can say in advance that a cleric praised by his secular clergy is a traitor to his function' [*On peut dire à l'avance que le clerc loué par des séculiers est traître à sa fonction*] (Benda 1977: 201). Thus public opinion, knowledge in its lowest form, the antithesis of apprehensive vigilance, tempts the intellectual to treachery. Far better to endorse D'Holbach's recommendation that the *philosophe* should write for 'thinking beings [*les êtres pensants*] of all times and nations', otherwise in being popular with his contemporaries he will be 'the slave of reigning opinions [*l'esclave des opinions régnautes*]', thereby sacrificing his reason, his vigilance [*lumières*], and his interest in the human species' (D'Holbach 2004b: 626). Demands all too idealistic probably, inspiring nevertheless, – but by no means so intellectually self-demeaning as in totting up 'research impact' or 'teaching excellence' grades.

(i.) In one sense intellectuals, *philosophes*, men and women of letters resemble a chorus in Greek tragedy commenting on the protagonist's fate, in this case the fate of knowledge, exemplified by the Enlightenment. It is most vociferous when the protagonist's destiny hangs in the balance, – in the Enlightenment's case, through a crisis in human self-orientation. Characterized by the heterogeneity of facts and values, by the synchronized coincidence of asynchronous attitudes, Modernity disorients. The Enlightenment, however, offers the disconcerting insight that the cognitive capacities for navigating it are those that created it. It confirms the fatal redundancy of the specialized expertise that sustains professional knowledge driven by its amplification, its atomization, towards its dissolution in ephemerality, its absorption into heterogeneity. In response the only recourse left to the Enlightenment's advocates, produced by a discourse predicated on 'Man', is to live through a cultural fiction, the product of an auxiliary logical function, to persist 'as if' [*als ob*] the world could be evaluated by reason, managed by virtue, and mended by scientific expertise (cf. Vaihinger 1918: 18ff.). The Enlightenment is, therefore, in a position to vindicate itself, – not through any utopian aspiration, but by illuminating an essentially modern, cultural failure, an essentially modern cognitive inadequacy: the superabundance of heterogeneous, ephemeral information; the inability to find in it, let alone act on, any compensating intellectual resource. And that justifies studying the Enlightenment: its uncompromising promotion of reason and virtue as existentially indispensable, its stressing by contrast the fatal redundancy of knowledge already known (cf. Davies 2016d).

The humanism to which historians appeal is now void: but this humanism – and this alone – still provides the basic rationale of historical scholarship. Historians can produce a 'vicious bifurcation' of the Enlightenment by differentiating between historians' and philosophers' conceptualizations. Evidently academic experts (intellectuals in the very broadest sense) undermine intellectuals who dedicate themselves to searching for pathogenic tendencies in contemporary culture. But in promoting themselves above philosophy, historians misconstrue its function. Oppositional, dissident, and essential for maintaining knowledge as a value, 'philosophy is not one among the sciences', but rather (as Whitehead argues) 'the survey of sciences, with the special objects

of their harmony, and of their completion'. Its substantiating practice 'brings to this task, not only the evidence of the separate sciences, but also its own appeal to concrete experience', thereby 'confronting science with concrete fact' (Whitehead 1967a: 87).

Because philosophers in their version of the Enlightenment have challenged the logical validity of its premises, historians in their version have attempted to redeem it. Accordingly, if the Enlightenment does mean anything, it can only be ascertained by 'emancipating historians from the philosophers' claim to primacy in this field [...] by upholding the epistemological status of historical knowledge' (Ferrone 2015: 63). In fact, 'the willingness of historians to stand up for the Enlightenment has been a salutary counterweight to the persistent criticism of the philosophers' (Robertson 2015: 126). But this perspective leaves the Enlightenment as a purely historical phenomenon, so that 'at this distance [...] we should not be trying to reassure ourselves that the Enlightenment still matters' (Robertson 2015: 129). Given that Montesquieu insists that 'philosophy has connections with everything', to proclaim the redundancy of philosophy for evaluating the Enlightenment will ensure the Enlightenment will not matter. The justification for studying it merely returns the reader to the narrow academic ethos of human self-refinement, of scholastic self-gratification: '[T]he Enlightenment [...] continues to be intensely rewarding to study and understand it, and to engage with its intellectual achievements' (Robertson 2015: 130).

Consequently, the Enlightenment is valuable now for exposing the limitations of a culture by default incapable of comprehending itself except through history, – and nothing else. It also defines itself against this nihilistic, apprehensive situation history denies. It inspires the search for purely anthropic resources, capacities of mind and language, that might reconceive, redefine, and, therefore, reorientate the world we live in. So, what ought to relate the Enlightenment to the present now is not continuity but immediacy. To view it as an inheritance, a legacy, or a bequest, leaves it abandoned. Dispensable too is its 'historical context' (whatever that means). The only context for the works of Enlightenment thinkers and philosophers is the context that exists prior to constructing any 'historical context': the context of the current reader's existence, of his or her thinking. Certainly, the reader may find in these works much that is now received as obsolete or offensive. But if the reader wants current, less prejudiced thinking, he or she knows where else to go. What Enlightenment texts offer is an elegance and precision of style and the sublime architecture of thought, – aesthetic qualities of writing immediately motivating current thinking. For thinking individuals in their 'inviolable solitude' [*unverbrüchlicher Einsamkeit*], they are gleams of vigilance (Adorno 1978: 22).

So Montesquieu dissociates himself from 'those who follow well-beaten paths to make their fortune'. For 'intellectuals make their own, particular path: they have new, concealed tracks; they walk where no-one has yet been. The world is new' [*Les gens d'esprit se font des routes particulières: ils ont des chemins cachés, nouveaux; ils marchent là où personne n'a encore été. Le monde est nouveau*] (Montesquieu 1949: 1299).

Notes

- 1 Davies 2003 offers a discussion of vigilance as an aspect of the German-Jewish Enlightenment.
- 2 Equating *homme d'esprit* with 'intellectual' anticipates the argument and clarifications in §2 (below), but for the argument here, there is no other convenient translation that comprises both 'wit' and 'mind'.
- 3 For reasons the argument will subsequently demonstrate, it omits exploring art, film, or music as types of intellectual work (which they clearly are). Aesthetic questions of media, technique, and genre would need to be explored. That would distract from the principal issues here: (a.) the intellectual's stance, its distanced reflection concentrating – for example – less on particular paintings and more on general criteria of taste; (b.) the specific nature of writing and reading, affirming universal values in private circumstances.
- 4 I hesitate to translate *lumière* as 'Enlightenment' since its French equivalent is very often *les lumières*, hence my opting for 'light'.
- 5 Ernst Cassirer's dismissal from his post in Hamburg and the years of exile in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and the United States preceding his death in 1945, are described in his wife's memoir (Cassirer 1981: 190ff.).
- 6 Valéry produces his own, cautious gloss on this observation (cf. Valéry 1957: 1811–1813).
- 7 Marx would not have read Montesquieu's essay: it was not published until 1892 (cf. Montesquieu 1951: 1481). The inference could be drawn by anyone with an interest in social anthropology or with a materialistic outlook. 'General intellect' occurs in Marx's *Grundrisse*: as fixed capital, the machines essential for production represent the 'objectified force of knowledge' [*vergegenständlichte Wissenskraft*]; this deployment of capital shows the extent to which 'general social knowledge' [*das allgemeine gesellschaftliche Wissen*] has become a productive force, so that 'the conditions of the process of social life itself come under the control of the general intellect' [*die Bedingungen des gesellschaftlichen Lebensprozesses selbst [sind] unter die Kontrolle des general intellect gekommen*] (Marx 1953: 594).



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Conclusion

1.

The preceding essays propose a reconception of the Enlightenment rather than a new interpretation. In doing so, they *criticize* (to use a Kantian term) the habitual, conventional presuppositions constituting interpretation as a dominant means of comprehension. The Enlightenment represents a particular case. These presuppositions enact ideological positions. Historicization is one of them, symptomatic of capitalism: capitalism in ideational form. The habit of historicization expresses the behaviouristic conditioning resulting from its technocratic culture and its socio-economic environment. The incessant production of latest things rendering present things obsolete, consigning them to the past, thereby creating a past, ensures the past predominates. Ideology dispenses with ordinary experience. What occurs, what has happened, it rather modifies in line with its ideational character. What results is the pre-emptive occlusion of experience, of its cognitive situation. Historicization resists Enlightenment.

2.

A conceptual field (i.e. Modernity) and mind [*Geist*] as a constant, typical cultural presence displace historicization predicated merely, but inevitably, on linear structures and temporal succession. With its heterogeneous and asynchronous components and their fluctuating values, Modernity apprehends its cognitive situation through their persistent, kaleidoscopic re-combination. The mind as a constant reiterative presence underpins this effort. It offers conceptual fields where even the most asynchronous values arrange themselves as immediate contemporaries, – as the Enlightenment demonstrates.

3.

Understanding texts, appreciating their value, attempting to realize them require pragmatism. An idea needs commitment as an expression of its current and possible future value. It endures not necessarily because of its innate potential. Rather it takes a reader *afterwards* to emphasize its value, to release

its energy, to affirm belief in its capacity to extend the scope of reality and to augment existence. In a historicized world, this pragmatism offers a dissenting cognitive method.

4.

Objective knowledge is the consequence of cognitive habit and disciplinary convention defined by scholastic consensus. It is illusory because there is no objective mind that discloses it or responds to it. Being ‘objective’ is otherwise a posture of disinterest adopted by subjectivity. There is, then, only subjective knowledge: not the solipsistic idealism of Fichte perhaps, but the phenomenology of mind and the parameters of consciousness as interpreted variously by Kant, Hegel, and Husserl. If knowledge were not subjective in its elucidation, there could be no transvaluation of its value and no pragmatic commitment to it. They come exclusively from subjectivity. Disciplinary convention and scholastic consensus would certainly impede them. Further, objectivity derives from knowledge logically abstracted from immediate experience, from its existential circumstances, its *Lebenswelt*. Scholastic consensus offers, therefore, only experiential impoverishment, an asceticism all the more keen as it closes in on its truth. Such a tendency is fatal for knowledge. Detached from subjective experience, bereft of pragmatic inspiration, it becomes inert. There only remains to embalm it.

5.

Interpretation is a form of exploitation. It focusses on what the ‘expert specialist’, the ‘scholastic connoisseur’, or the ‘academic disciplinarian’ can extract from the text or intriguing *objet d’art*. The past is thus seen as an endless resource, predisposed to contributing to the historian’s ‘self-enrichment’. By contrast, the intention here is to assert that a text is illuminated by what interests its reader contributes to it or invests in it. It means, therefore, to establish a dialectical relationship between the contingent scope of contemporary learning and the already acknowledged intellectual scope of the Enlightenment. This antithetical relationship offers opportunities for methodological dissent, hence for generating reconceptions. It thus produces conceptual fields in which contingent re-evaluations and already acknowledged intellectual scope coincide, – particularly since reconceptions are not historically, but logically, determined.

6.

For its detractors the Enlightenment stands for the totalitarian domination of reason, hence for the denial of individual freedoms, for repressing the cognitive value of emotional experience. However, as a dimension of Modernity it evinces inherent asynchronicities and heterogeneity. To the broader aesthetic culture of the Enlightenment emotion was, in any case, nothing strange, as

shown, e.g. by the popularity of Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) or Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* [The Suffering of Young Werther] (1774). Rather the disciplinary conventions of Enlightenment research, the scholastic habit itself, superimpose its dominant rationalizations on the comprehension of the Enlightenment as a means of keeping it historically distanced. The attendant amplification of the ephemeral produced by the prevailing trends of scholastic connoisseurship only re-affirms the asynchronous and heterogeneous nature of modern knowledge, of the Modernity in the Enlightenment it sets out to evaluate.

7.

As the pre-emptive occlusion of the horizon of consciousness, historicization discourages its practitioners from committing themselves to the inherent intention of the Enlightenment, i.e. to 'think better'. This discouragement arises not from a self-evident cognitive situation, but is already unconsciously present, automatically activated *a priori*, before interpretation is even initiated. The interpretation is indeed *a priori* formulated in that 'discourse that [above all else] knows itself' (Faye). It is produced from a (disciplined academic) culture of critical discourse that 'authorizes itself [...] as the standard of *all* "serious" speech', so that 'speech becomes impersonal, [...] disembodied, de-contextualized and self-grounded' (Gouldner). The essays here instead attempt to achieve 'good speech' as 'speech that can make its own principles *explicit* and is oriented to conforming with them, rather than stressing context-sensitivity and context-variability' (ibid.).

8.

The Enlightenment confirms that a modern culture must foster vigilance, that it must be alert to something unforeseen (as both Montesquieu, citing Cicero, and Valéry recognize). Modern culture depends on intellectual self-reflection as much as on technocratic competence. But it is haunted particularly by the unforeseen (*l'imprévu*), reason's blind spot. The unforeseen surfaces inevitably, as culturally self-induced fatality. It generates its own ethos of apprehension: it was already there, inherent in the culture. The Enlightenment has no answer for it, not even with the notion that this is still the best of all possible worlds. The human tendency for *parapraxis* (*Fehlleistung*) defines the Enlightenment's limitations.

9.

The value of the Enlightenment: it demonstrates how the transvaluation of values occurs. Bayle's *Pensées diverses sur la comète* (1682/1727) is exemplary. In one sense cultures based on superstition and prognostication have their own rationale, – if their irrational premises are accepted. Drawing on a wide range

of ancient and modern cultures and on ingrained beliefs held by people of all social classes, Bayle exposes the contradictions, inconsistencies, and blatant absurdities that influence human behaviour. His work is an appeal for life to be guided by sufficient reason, both to dispel the terror generated by ignorance and to foster a social ethos of adequate understanding. Transvaluation comes with dissent and criticism, but above all with commitment to an idea: it depends on writing, the published book, as evidence of the pre-requisite intellectual commitment.

10.

It is tempting to assert that the value of the Enlightenment – and what determines its fate – consists in its concern with how the world is to be understood and how, given that understanding, human action is to be orientated. This, though, is an idealistic aim, a cosy justification of the social academic-function. Surely the converse carries more conviction. As a nexus of knowledge and action the Enlightenment reveals only its current irrelevance for human self-orientation, how far short of its ideals this current self-orientation falls. The Enlightenment may well be illuminating, but only because its light projects ghostly shadowgraphs of human life played out in a post-ethical culture, a culture of mounting moral deficit.

11.

Philosophers have indeed produced different reconceptions of the world; it is indeed more urgent that they should change it. In the meantime philosophical reconceptions *have* changed the world: changes occur regularly, almost daily. The world cannot help changing: innovation – so tedious – is now nothing new. What matters is changing reconceptions, changing what changes.

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